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NEXT GENERATION

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November 1997

25

breakthrough games

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volume three

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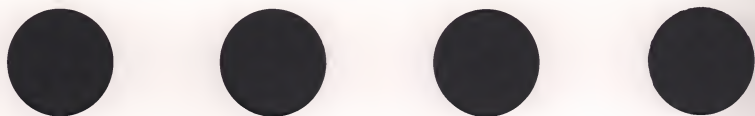
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Revealed inside: 25 of the most exciting and innovative computer and videogame projects under development today. As the shelves become crammed with more and more derivative, me-too efforts, count on Next Generation to continue to cut through the hype and deliver The Truth

Too many games?

There are currently more than **1,000 computer and videogames** in development **around the globe**. Many will not even ship, but of those that do, **few will be memorable**.



While no game can truly be judged until it is finished, some games, even those early in development, possess certain qualities that mark them as **projects to watch**. *Tomb Raider* was one. *Wave Race* was another.



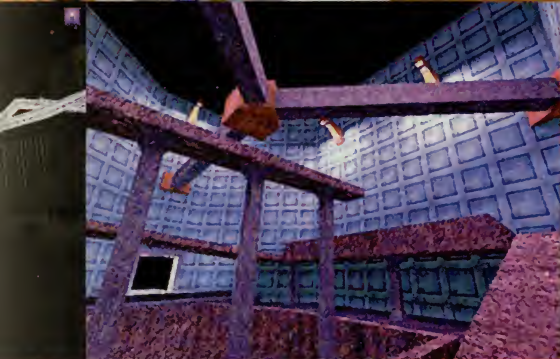
This month, **Next Generation** picks **25 titles** that share this potential by reaching for new heights in gameplay or technology. **Will they all be hits?** Probably not. The price for reaching higher is the chance of falling further. But the contributions these games will make to the **art of game design** will be felt for years to come. **The story begins on page 38.**



opening

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The **Next Generation Disc** boasts more than 45 gameplay movies, including eight live interviews that focus on titles for PC and console gamers alike

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The **Next Generation Disc** takes game coverage to new heights with interactive demos, digital developer diaries, and dozens of gameplay movies. Disc users enjoy seeing highly anticipated titles in action before they hit the Internet or retail shelves.

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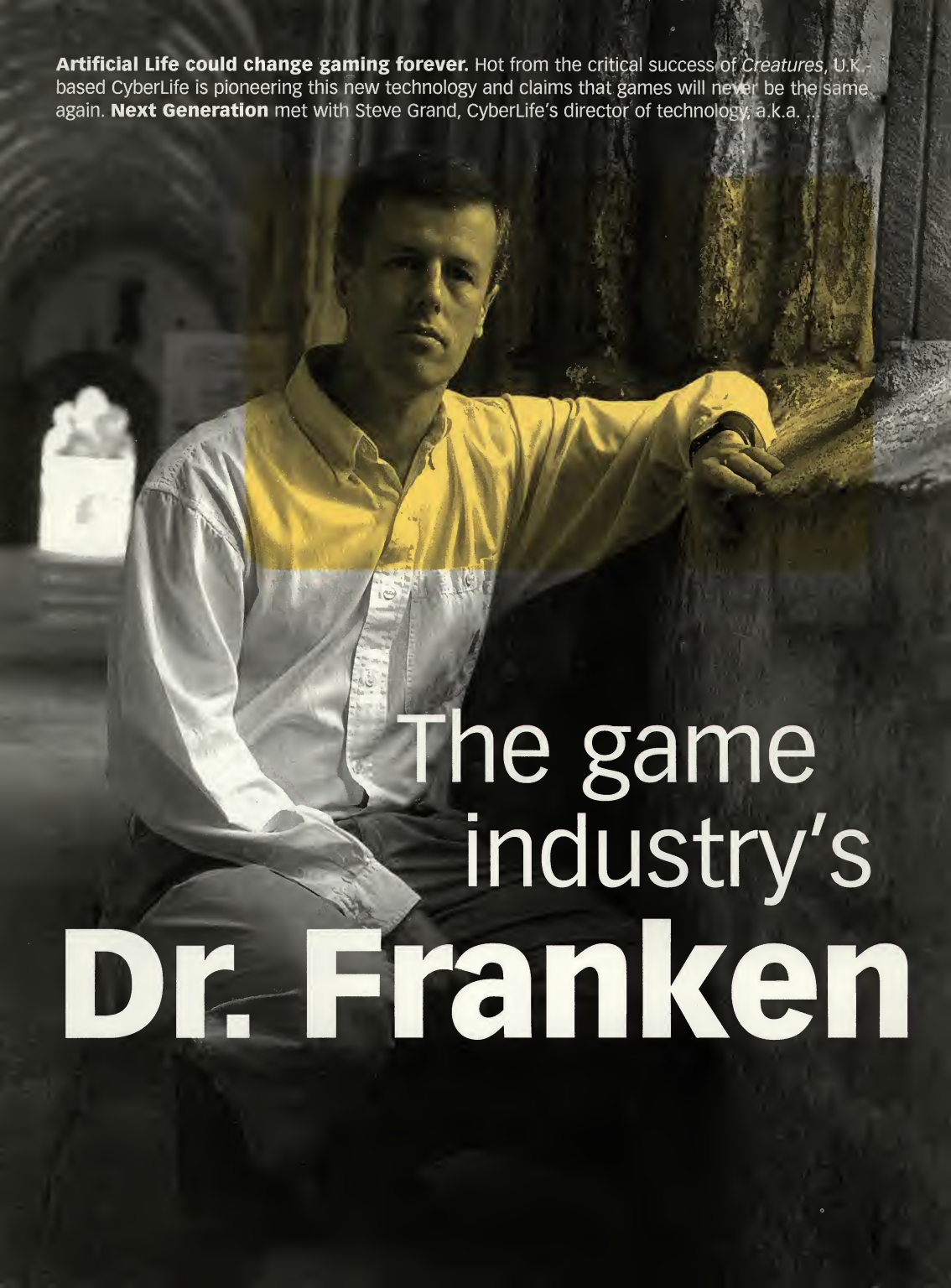
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—Computer Games Strategy Plus, June 1997

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A man with short brown hair, wearing a white long-sleeved shirt with a yellow horizontal stripe across the chest, is leaning against a dark, textured stone wall. He is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. The background is dark and features arched stone structures, with a small, bright light source visible in the distance on the left.

Artificial Life could change gaming forever. Hot from the critical success of *Creatures*, U.K.-based CyberLife is pioneering this new technology and claims that games will never be the same again. **Next Generation** met with Steve Grand, CyberLife's director of technology, a.k.a.

The game industry's **Dr. Franken**

During the final stages of the development of *Creatures*, strange things started happening. The game (published by Mindscape) is kind of a complex Tamagotchi, in which the player has to guide little critters called Norns around the game world, helping them learn about their habitat, survive, and evolve (see review page 206). One day, a play tester went to lunch, leaving the game running on his PC with just one solitary Norn wondering about. He came back from lunch to find the game world full of Norns squabbling with each other. Where the hell had they come from?

It turns out the solitary Norn had worked out — all by itself — that if it picked up Norn eggs and threw them in the incubator, out would pop a friend. This made it happy. It then spent all its subsequent time scouring the world for eggs and placing them in the incubator.

The salient point of this story being that no one at CyberLife knew that this would happen. No one programmed this behavior. It was a complete surprise. Except, of course, that it wasn't. Because when you're dealing with

Artificial Life, you have to expect the unexpected ...

What Is Artificial Life?

RG: That's a really pretty easy question. Artificial Life is a computer simulation of life. It's a computer program that simulates the behavior of living organisms. It's a computer program that simulates the behavior of living organisms. It's a computer program that simulates the behavior of living organisms. It's a computer program that simulates the behavior of living organisms.

Steve: To an Artificial Intelligence person, the pinnacle of success would be to create a machine that plays chess. They think that because human beings find it hard to play chess, playing chess must be a very intelligent thing to do, and so that's what they try to achieve. However, if you drop a chess computer in the bathtub, it isn't smart enough to call out for help or find a way out. So, if you ask me, it's not very intelligent.

Artificial Life vs. Artificial Intelligence

Steve: Artificial Intelligence and Artificial Life take two completely different approaches to the problem of

recreating lifelike intelligence and behavior. On the one hand, AI attempts to model and replicate specific areas of behavior of very complex systems (such as human beings) without regard to the underlying structure that makes them what they are. On the other hand, AL people would consider the intelligence of a rat to be an ambitious goal and set about trying to model the underlying structures that make up rats — almost like trying to replicate a rat from the ground up — in the belief that genuine ratlike intelligence will eventually emerge from the system.

RG: Artificial Life is a simulation of life. It's a computer program that simulates the behavior of living organisms. It's a computer program that simulates the behavior of living organisms. It's a computer program that simulates the behavior of living organisms. It's a computer program that simulates the behavior of living organisms.

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prepares for a holiday in France by learning a few French phrases, parrot fashion, and someone who actually sits down and learns the language from scratch. The first person may appear to achieve the more immediately impressive results, but in the long term, the second person will prevail. In theory, at least. **Steve:** AI is a top-down approach to the problem — it tries to control the system and mimic effects. Whereas Artificial Life is a bottom-up approach — it tries to recreate the cause of the behavior, the underlying structures of whatever life-form is being simulated, and let the behavior occur naturally as a result.

NG: And in this way, you will achieve superior results to a solution based on AI?

Steve: It is the only way to create truly lifelike behavior, yes. If you approach the problem in the normal AI way and try and mimic behavior without considering or replicating the processes that determine this behavior, you end up fudging all the time. You end up bolting on rule after rule to try and explain all the

If you drop a chess computer in the bathtub, it isn't smart enough to call for help

little quirks. In this way, most attempts to create lifelike behavior using AI suffer from immense complexity problems and eventually programmers just give up.

NG: As more and more AI routines are added in an attempt to get more and more sophisticated behavior, programmers find themselves constantly having to wallpaper over cracks ...

Steve: Exactly. And the user is not fooled. It's obvious that the people you shoot in *Doom*, for example, are not real people, and no matter how hard you try with the AI approach, you will never be able to fool people.

NG: So AI is the best long-term way to mimic lifelike behavior, even though — at this stage — it is still in its infancy?

Steve: Obviously, at this stage you can't expect AI to achieve everything you want. Your Artificial Life won't immediately be able to play chess, for example. But the belief is that eventually and way down the line, it may learn how to play for itself.

A core philosophy is that only by following the same evolutionary route that real life took will we ever be able to achieve intelligent systems at a human level.

And because AI is still such a new science, it is a necessary step to start off with something like rats and then work upwards.

Building the beast

NG: So implementing this theory, how do you start work on creating AI?

Steve: If you're attempting to create some kind of artificial animal life — say a rat or a monkey — you would try and recreate the way its brain works. An animal brain is a neural network — a network of neurons, which are relatively simple processing structures, wired together in very complicated ways. The behavior of the brain is the

result of the wiring and not some smart, central neuron somewhere that understands things. It's a parallel system, as opposed to, say, a computer that is a serial machine handling one task at a time.

NG: So it's the way these individual neurons interact and are wired together — the structure of this neural network — that results in an animal's behavior?

Steve: Right. Compare it to an ants' nest. Individual ants are very stupid, but a colony of ants can make extremely complex mounds with tunnels and so on, even though there are no little architect ants who know the plans and are telling the others what to do. The mound is simply the result of a lot of little ants doing their own thing, guided by very simple rules.

If you look at human beings, we are made up of about one trillion little cells. Each cell is very simple, relatively speaking — it just does a few things. So you have a trillion little cells in your body doing very simple jobs. Not one of them's in charge. Not one of them even knows what all the other cells are there for or what they do. And yet the whole thing fits together and works as an extremely complicated single machine.

Brains based on neural networks work in a very similar way.

NG: And if you can model that neural network on a computer, you can effectively recreate the processes that result in complex animal behavior?

Steve: And at that point you have Artificial Life, yes.

Origins of Artificial Life

NG: How did Artificial Life first begin?

Steve: Artificial Life really started in 1987 when Dr. Christopher Langton organized a conference in Los Alamos. He'd discovered that there were a lot of scientists and researchers working with common goals in different areas, but that up until this conference, these people weren't even aware of each other's existence. They certainly weren't talking together.

NG: So what kinds of things were all these people working on?

Steve: For example, there were people working on self-replicating systems, people working on complexity theory, and people working in various fields that were more akin to massively parallel biological systems than the traditional serial computer fields. Fundamentally, all these people were working on complex adaptive systems — such as economic systems, in which thousands of individuals acting autonomously create trends — and he realized that all these projects shared a common fundamental premise, and this was the start of Artificial Life.

NG: Was Artificial Life given an official definition?

Steve: Yes, Dr. Langton offered that "Artificial Life is the study of man-made systems that exhibit behaviors characteristic of natural living systems. It complements the traditional biological sciences concerned with the analysis of living organisms by attempting to synthesize lifelike behaviors within computers and other artificial media. By extending the empirical foundation upon which biology is based beyond the carbon-chained life that has evolved on earth, Artificial Life can contribute to theoretical biology by locating life as we know it within the larger picture of life as it could be."

NG: "Life as it could be"? That's an interesting suggestion ...

Steve: The assumption has always been made that life is what we see. If you asked a biologist 50 years ago — or even now, sometimes — how to define life, he or she would come up with a definition in which a lot of the criteria were only applicable to carbon-based life because this is the only type of life we know. Life-forms on earth — plants, animals, fish — all happen to be made of carbon, and so far we haven't seen any little green men who were made out of silicon.

But life doesn't have to be regarded in this narrow way. The concept of life itself can be extended, and by trying to extract the central principles of life and ignoring the carbon — ignoring the detailed chemistry of life as we happen to know it on earth — we can establish what it is about life in general that makes life so much more interesting than nonlife.

NG: So you're arguing that life isn't necessarily restricted to carbon-based plants and animals, and may in fact exist in all manner of other forms. That's a revolutionary idea ...

Steve: You have to come to terms with a view of life that is not absolute. I believe that there is no such thing as "being alive" or "not being alive," but certainly some things are more alive than others. Maybe a thunderstorm is more alive than a brick, for example. And not only are some things more alive than others, but they can be alive in different ways — so life is not just a one-dimensional continuum.

NG: So what things that most people would consider "dead" — or at least "without life" — might in fact be alive?

Steve: When you start looking at the world in this way, all sorts of phenomena — such as economies or weather systems — show some characteristics of



living systems. What's more, there doesn't appear to be any kind of particularly important cutoff point where you can say that "these things are really alive" and "these other things really aren't alive."

NG: So are the life-forms in *Creatures* really alive?

Steve: I would argue that my creatures lie somewhere where you would put that cutoff point if you were determined to put one. Certainly, I think it's a very interesting — and valid — question whether or not the creatures are really alive. [Smiles].

I believe that there is no such thing as "being alive" or "not being alive"

Creatures, creatures, everywhere

NG: So how did the *Creatures* project get started?

Steve: About five years ago I had an idea for a game involving a whole artificial world in which you looked after a computer pet. This was before there were any other computer pets and before I'd thought much about Artificial Life. I saw this game as a small, six-month project. As I said, this was five years ago. [Smiles].

But then I realized that people wouldn't care about these computer pets unless they believed in them — unless they believed that they were alive. This, then, became my goal. I realized that no one would react with emotions to what they knew was just a sprite walking around on screen according to an algorithm, so it soon became obvious that a standard kind of rule-based system was never going to come up behavior-rich enough.

NG: So where did this lead you?

Steve: Once I'd committed myself to creating believable, rich behavior, I thought I'd start out with the idea of a neural network. It just so happened that I'd been studying neural networks and so I kind of knew where to start. I thought it would be fairly easy, and as



talking



it turned out, it wasn't too hard. I went and sat on top of a hill for a week and figured out how to get it up and running and came up with a mechanism that I thought would work. I programmed it, it worked, and I got the rich dynamics from it that I wanted.

NG: So you're saying that the *Creatures* project was easy?

Steve: No, not at all. [Laughs]. As it turned out, the initial neural network was just the start of a very slippery slope, and as I decided to add yet more and

Computer games as we know them will be a relatively short-lived phenomenon

more realism to the game world, things got very, very complicated. Over the course of development I added to the creatures much, much more detail, including a digestive system, an immune system, and a drive-based punishment/reward system. All of these were based on accurate biochemistry models — so, once again, I'm not trying to mimic behavior but recreate the systems and biochemical makeup of real living things. I also added bacteria into the game world (bacteria that were capable of mutating into different strains) and even a reproductive system.

NG: At what point did you say, "enough is enough" and wrap up the project?

Steve: The company had given up all hope of ever publishing the game, but I went back to the drawing board for the third time and finally added genetics. So instead of programming in all of the biochemical and neural structures that made up the creatures, instead I programmed a model of genetics in which genes cope with these things — I took it yet another step further down the ladder.

In other words, there is nothing in the program that knows about being a creature. The program only knows about being a neuron or being a biochemical, and then it is the genetics that tells the program how

to be a creature.

NG: And that is the stage at which the project was completed?

Steve: There was just one more thing. Because I had a reproductive system, it was a fairly simple matter for these creatures to breed. Now, because the game was based on genetics, the creatures could pass their genes from parents to offspring and cross over, and mutation could happen. And that's how a million or so creatures got released into the world and are now capable of evolution and potentially much better brain models than I was smart enough to think of.

NG: And all without any further input or programming? They can simply evolve themselves?

Steve: Yes, and they will continue to do so.

Life, but not as we know it

NG: So just how complicated are these creatures? If you were to compare them to "real" life, what

animals would you compare them to?

Steve: They are different ... it's difficult to answer. For example, they can speak, not in a sophisticated way like we do, but then no other animal can speak, so in that sense they are very sophisticated. The psychological model that I used to design their brains is taken from the kind of behaviors of rats, so we're kind of at the rodent level.

NG: But surely a rat — compared to, say, an ant or a slug — is a very complicated animal?

Steve: Oh, absolutely. But of course in the virtual world you can cheat. In real life a large proportion of a rat's complexity is devoted to moving it around in physical space. To move a rat around involves hundreds of coordinated muscles, but we didn't have to bother about any of them. To move one of my creatures around a TV screen is a lot easier.

NG: One of the things that most people find hard to accept about *Creatures* is that some of the Norns' behavior can't be explained. But because they have no preset behavior rules, and everything they do is a natural consequence of their genetic makeup, unpredictable behavior has to be expected, right?

Steve: Right, and it's quite a scary thing. It's a very complicated thing, and I had no idea that my model would result in the kind of behavior that we see. Occasionally, people ask me to explain why Norns do certain things and I have no idea. I try to work it out, but I can't explain all the steps as to how it actually happened.

You have to learn to let go, and again, this is one of the big differences between Artificial Intelligence (in which you attempt to have complete control over everything) and Artificial Life (in which you just have to sit back and see what happens).

Playing with Artificial Life

NG: So is *Creatures* state of the art as far as Artificial Life is concerned?

Steve: So I've been told. I've spoken about it at various universities and scientific conferences now —

usually to wild applause. And everyone's very impressed.

NG: So what are the implications for games? Do we really need AI? Can't AI provide enough different options and fake behavior to the extent that we can't tell they're not real?

Steve: No, humans will always be able to tell the difference, and already computer games have reached the limits of what can be done with AI. Already game programs are too complex and no one is making any real progress. Currently, the robustness of programs is weak, project schedules always slip, and bugs are untraceable — traditional, serial computer science is reaching its limits.

Artificial Life is truly the way forward to achieve "realism." Take a soccer game, for example. They're great fun, but the players don't behave realistically. In theory, there's no reason why we shouldn't model Artificial Life forms of soccer players and have realistic behavior on a soccer field be the consequence.

NG: So will game programmers be able to plug in Artificial Life solutions to their existing programs?

Steve: Yes, it's possible, but it would be better in the long term to start completely from scratch and base all virtual worlds (and games based on such worlds) on this kind of Artificial Life technology. Again, it's working from the bottom up as opposed to the top down.

NG: So what's next for CyberLife after *Creatures*?

Steve: Our long-term goal is based on the assumption that computer games as we know them will be a relatively short-lived phenomenon. As all media tend towards integration online, entertainment will move into being virtual worlds that people want to go and play in. So the future of the entertainment industry is in creating virtual worlds online. Now, the existing game and graphics industry is very good at creating 3D models of what these virtual worlds look like, but the better the graphics get, the more embarrassing the lack of richness in the world's behavior becomes. And I am interested in providing that richness. I am interested in making it a real world.

NG: And Artificial Life will provide this richness?

Steve: Absolutely, but that's not all it can do. The other problem with virtual worlds is that in them everyone wants to be the hero. And yet there has to be people to do the dirty work. Someone has to be the barkeeper, the streetcleaner, and yes the cannon fodder for humans to command. No human will want to play these roles, and yet without these characters, the world will appear sterile and unlife-like. The only way to solve this problem satisfactorily is with Artificial Life.

NG: So what's the next step?

Steve: A long way down the line, we've got to be looking at Artificial Life that is as intelligent as humans. I see no theoretical obstruction to simulations of sentient life-forms that think and know of their own existence.

NG: According to science fiction writers everywhere, this business of knowing of their own existence — being "self-aware" — is a big deal, right?

Steve: Well, no one really knows what being "self-aware" means. My creatures are self-aware in that

their brains know that they are bored, or know that they are hungry, or know that they have been hit on the head and it hurts — so they are aware both of the external world and the internal world, so they are self-aware in this sense. But this isn't what we usually mean when we talk of being self-aware. We are always thinking of the little person inside our head who is looking out. But there so clearly isn't one! So it's a big philosophical problem to try and figure out what that means and whether such a structure can emerge.

NG: Are you saying that there is no "self" and that human beings are nothing more than very complicated biochemical machines?

Steve: A human being is just a machine, and so it can be modeled. Certainly I have no doubt that a computer can model any other machine. Whether or not we can ever figure out how to create a model as complex as a human is another question, but technically, there's no reason why it can't be done.

NG: And how long will it take until you are creating Artificial Life that is as sophisticated as a human being?

Steve: Our goal is twenty years. There's a good chance we won't make it, but the road along the way should be very, very interesting. We already have new brain models that are far more sophisticated than the ones used in *Creatures* — it's just a matter of following the steps of evolution.

ng



To call it a driving game is It's more like a flight



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misleading. simulator.



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Sega's next generation console: first concrete details of the PowerVR-based system are revealed • **Project X:** the new super console from the designer of Jaguar • **ECTS:** the show across the Atlantic • **Tokyo Game Show:** the show across the Pacific • **3D Studio MAX R2:** first hands-on report • **Plus:** Nintendo's software slips again



Essential news and analysis that affect the games you play

Sega's next generation console revealed

As Saturn slowly fades, details on Sega's next console surface



These PowerVR-accelerated shots from *Virtual On* should give some idea of the performance to be expected from Sega's next console. What these screens don't show is the chip's smooth animation or graphic effects



SH4 chip from Hitachi. Its graphics are rendered by the PowerVR 2, which can produce an amazing 1.5 million polygons per second with mip-mapping and texture filtering. The chipset also enables hardware fogging, lights, shadows, and more.

The sound is based on a dedicated Yamaha chip capable of producing 64 simultaneous voices. For its media drive, the company has gone an unconventional route by using a dual speed system that can read regular CDs and Dural-specific 1gig super-density discs. Also, the console will include support for a modem card, but it is unclear whether it will be standard or an add-on.

Determined not to make the same mistake it did with Saturn, Sega has focused on making its programming libraries accessible to ensure developer support. The new system will use Microsoft development tools, and the PowerVR chip (which supports both Open GL and Direct3D) should make PC and arcade ports simple.

Sega's new system will be the first true step forward towards the next generation of videogame consoles when it is released in late 1998. How Sega uses this early leg-up on the competition will very likely determine the future of the company as a mass-market hardware manufacturer. More details on the system will follow next month.

ng

Sega Dural Specs

CPU: Hitachi SH-4 200Mhz
Graphics chip: NEC PowerVR 2 (Highlander)
Sound chip: Yamaha ARM7-based ASIC with 64 simultaneous voices
Main RAM: 8MB
Video/texture RAM: 8MB
Audio RAM: 2MB
Caches: 8K Instruction, 16K data, 128K CD-ROM buffer
Output: VGA and 640 x 240 anti-aliased RF

Other features:

- 12x CD-ROM drive
- 1GB super dense CD format
- Serial port for PCMCIA modem
- Flash RAM carts for data storage

Sega's next entry into the console wars will be crucial to its future; simply put, the company's future in consumer hardware depends on it.

After achieving surprising success with the underpowered Genesis system, the company has misstepped three straight times with new hardware. The Sega CD and 32X were notable only for their failures, and the Saturn never really managed to thrive.

The goal for the company now is to create a system that hits the market early, without getting overshadowed by future consoles. To ensure this, Sega worked with three different forces to build a strong contender in the new wave

of consoles. Sega of Japan developed an NEC/PowerVR system (Dural) while Sega of America worked on a 3Dfx-based system of its own (Black Belt). Sega also worked with Microsoft to create a developer-friendly atmosphere for both systems.

After some serious backroom negotiations by NEC, the Black Belt was discarded in favor of Dural. This prompted 3Dfx to file suit against Sega and sent the entire Sega of America hardware development team to the front office with resignations in hand.

The Japanese system that emerged victorious, though, is a truly amazing piece of technology. The system will run on the 200MHz

Project X: A Mario killer in the making

Details emerge on the next generation of game consoles

Details have reached **Next Generation** of new graphics technology that could send shockwaves through the videogame industry. VM Labs is a U.S. company working on advanced, games-related silicon technology that is thought to be firmly at the apex of realtime visualization.

Although no firm proof has yet come to light, **Next Generation** believes that at the heart of this clandestine project are two of the most talented and experienced designers in the videogame industry — hardware guru Richard Miller and renowned techno-hippie Jeff Minter.

Miller created much of the groundbreaking chip technology for the Sinclair ZX Spectrum in the early 1980s and later became head of R&D for Atari in the U.S., going on to create the impressive chipset for the Jaguar. (It was the utter lack of a development system that hurt the Jag.) Programmer and designer Minter, meanwhile, is a resolute nonconformist and technical games wizard. The two have worked together at Atari's U.S. facility in the past, although Minter has just moved back to his hometown in Wales to continue



VM Labs is publicizing "Project X" on its web site (www.vmlabs.com). It doesn't take a genius to figure out that Jaguar designer Richard Miller hopes the technology will form the heart of a Nintendo 64 killer

work on the project.

Codenamed "Project X," the technology is currently shrouded in secrecy, but messages on Minter's own web site, Yak's Zoo (www.magicnet.net/~yak/zoo.html), suggest a breakthrough: "I have begun to explore incredible new spaces, and the possibilities just stagger me ... I have only just begun to lightly tickle the surface of what this thing can do. My chin is bruised from the number of times my jaw has hit the floor. The

potential for algorithmic graphics on this thing is just mind-melting. Talk about machines of loving grace ... X is beautiful. Just beautiful." He goes on to talk about imagery, including "a receding plain of liquid pyramids."

Minter's penchant for the more psychedelically tinged side of life may lead some to be cynical about such musings, yet the track record of both parties is unquestionable. We hope to have more information soon.

ng

Who is it?

He moved his daughter's crib from her bedroom to the living room so he could use her room to create his first major video arcade game effort. Later, he sold out for millions of dollars to Warner Communications and went on to start Chuck E. Cheese's Pizza Time Theaters. Name the game too.



VM Labs founder Richard Miller is an associate of Jeff Minter (left), the llama-obsessed coder who is working with technology whose specs are believed to be well in excess of the canned M2 system

breaking

Tokyo catches gaming hysteria

Tokyo Game Show packs in consumers with hundreds of new titles



Konami's *G.A.S.P.* (top) was one of a number of new 3D fighters for the game-starved N64. Seta's *N64 Rev Limit* puts *Ridge Racer* to shame

It is ...

Nolan Bushnell, father of the videogame industry. The game he worked on in his daughter's room was *Computer Space*, an arcade version of Steve Russell's *Spacewar*. Nutting Associates released the game, which flopped. Bushnell formed Atari to release his next game *Pong*.

Roughly an hour's ride from the center of downtown Tokyo, the Makuhari Messe convention center was the site of the Autumn Tokyo Game Show.

Despite having only about a quarter of the square footage of E3, the Tokyo Game Show managed to pack in nearly twice as many attendees in one day as E3 did over the course of three days. The difference is that Tokyo Game Show's focus is entirely on games and the consumer (given that two of the three days are open to the public) instead of E3's focus on companies, the industry, and selling to retailers.

There is little doubt that Sony's machine was the dominant platform of the show, with more than 53% of all titles being shown running on PlayStation. Square's booth was easily the most impressive. *Einhandler*, *Front Mission Alternative*, and *Front Mission 2* were shown in playable form, wowing show-goers. Nonplayable presentations of *Parasite Eve*, *Chocobo's Mysterious Dungeon*, and *Sokaiji* (which resembled *Bushido Blade* in an action/adventure with



Eager gamers braved the heat and humidity of the packed but non-air-conditioned convention center for their chance to play new games

magic) provided further reason to be excited for the future of Square. Hudson also turned some heads with its first PlayStation title, a 3D fighter titled *Bloody Roar* (which currently has a working title of *Beastorizer* in the U.S.), where characters can transform from buff humans into raging animals. A little-known team called Easystaff was showing an impressive strategy/RPG in the form of *Brigandine*, a game that should satisfy fans of *Military Madness* or *Iron Storm*.

Saturn also had a surprisingly strong showing, given its moribund status in the States. Notable titles included *Burning Rangers* from Yuji Naka (of *Sonic* fame) and Tecmo's *Dead or Alive*. Sega also showed Saturn versions of *Sega Touring Car* and a massively updated version of *Sonic R*, a new racing title featuring Sega's mascot with an "attitude." Hudson's booth also

provided the surprising *Bomberman 2* for Saturn, which boasted polygonal environments using many of the same play mechanics as Hudson's forthcoming *Bomberman 64*.

While N64 continues to lag behind the 32-bit platforms' sales in Japan, third parties in Japan seem to have finally picked up the pace of development, with many new titles being showcased. Imagineer showed an impressive 3D fighter currently titled *Fighting Cup*, while Seta publicized its two games, *Wild Choppers* and *Rev Limit* (each of which is to be published by Nintendo of America by year's end). Konami showcased its version of *In the Zone 64*, as well as a new but early 3D fighter called *G.A.S.P.*

While not expected to ever become the industry showcase that is E3, the Tokyo Game Show was even larger this year than it was last and promises to become more influential next year.



Namco announced its new *Chronicles* boxed set that will include all six Namco classics collections, as well its latest offering, *Namco Classics Encore* (which was unveiled at the show), all for about \$50

ng

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A.L.I.V.E.
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breaking

ECTS shows off everyone's true colors

colin campbell reports from Europe's largest game show

Nothing could have illustrated the profound differences between Nintendo and Sony more effectively than London game industry trade show ECTS. Sony sees the world as a big round ball. Nintendo views it as a line heading due West from Tokyo. Sony's stand reflected its image in Europe, which is much like its image in North America, yet more so. Pick any of the next few words — savvy, global, cool, smart, wise, deliberate — and they add up to the most important word, which is “winning.”

Here was a company that showed its dominance of the market with dozens of games, spanning all manner of new and old genres. Sony's stand could have been an exhibition all in itself. It felt like some effort had been made by the firm, which loves to show off its own sense of being, of self-awareness and control.

In contrast, Nintendo's booth was poor. I left with the impression that the biggest game on the stand was ancient racer *Mario Kart*, with a guest appearance by *Goldeneye*. Despite Europe's general fondness for Nintendo, it does not like its loyalty to be rewarded with indifference bordering on arrogance. Sony, realizing that Europe could soon be the largest market in the world, has sent some of its best people there to woo this fractured populace. Nintendo evidently feels that Europe is some place between New York and Bombay.

Chris Deering heads up the European PlayStation operation and is probably the smartest Westerner pushing Sony's console. His keynote speech offered the prospect of a console market every bit as big as the market for VCRs. He spoke of the self-evidence of consoles not competing with PCs before delivering a crushing verdict on the increasingly troubled PC game market. He barely bothered to talk about carts versus CDs or quantity versus quality or any of the other rhetorical gambits favored by Sony and Nintendo execs in more closely contested arenas.

But this was not just a show about global culture. It was also a celebration of local talent. We Brits live on a small island and have been suffering from the slowly deflating sensation of a punctured reputation since the days of Jefferson. So, when we're doing good, we don't waste much time braying about it. In the game industry this has created the phrase “Britsoft,” which loosely

Talkback

An irregular look inside the heads of some of the world's leading videogame designers

Q: What can you boast about in *Legend of Zelda 64*?

Shigeru Miyamoto: I've always tried to create places in videogames that don't exist in the real world. You might even feel like you've actually been there. And these thoughts and feelings, they find a shape, one by one. You can get into the game if you turn off the music. And if you turn off the music, you might start crying because of fear — dungeons contain lots of traps and are really scary. You might want to curse the person who created the dungeon. Maybe you will have a nightmare later.

Q: What about special effects in the game?

SM: If you walk in 3D, you can see a horse in the distance, then you can change the camera angle and ride the horse and run ... but maybe you will have fun just seeing the horse coming towards you.

translates to the sound of pasty-faced men patting themselves on the back.

The evidence is all there: Rare, Psygnosis, Core, Argonaut, Bullfrog, DMA, Paul Finnegan at Rare thinks it has something to do with an “adventurous spirit” among U.K. developers. Jeremy Smith at Core reckons the Brits can “get code to do things more efficiently” than Americans. Jez San at Argonaut thinks Britain's terrible weather has produced a generation of kids who'd rather code than go outside. How this explains some of the world's finest soccer players is unclear.

It all boils down to two facts: 1) Sure the Brits make some good games; 2) We should stick to coding and leave the self-serving introspection well alone.

ng



Japan has Tokyo Game Show, North America has E3, and Europe has ECTS. This year, patriotism in the form of “Britsoft” was the hot topic

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fickle, paranoid *and* evil.



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breaking

Nintendo dealt blow

Company sees delays, licensing problems

Last year's late September launch for Nintendo 64 was both good and bad for the company. While the proximity to Christmas did wonders for sales of the first true 64-bit system, a lack of inventory undercut Nintendo's plans for a return to holiday domination in the videogame market. Many industry insiders predicted that Nintendo would not make the same mistake twice, and that this Christmas would find Nintendo number one in the market. However, if the last two months are any indication, then Nintendo's plans may be for naught — several key games have been delayed (*Zelda 64*, *Banjo-Kazooie*, and *Conker's Quest*), and its European licensing contract is being restructured.

Banjo-Kazooie, Nintendo's flagship title at E3, and *Conker's Quest* (both covered in NG 34) are being developed by Rare. With the announcement of their delays, along with *Zelda's* delay, a mere two major titles that were showcased at Nintendo's E3 booth will be available this Christmas (*Goldeneye* and *Tetrisphere*), both of which were released a full four months before the holiday. Nintendo has thrown the public a bone called *Diddy Kong Racing* (already being called "Diddy Kart" by the cynical), another Rare effort that is uncomfortably similar to *Mario Kart*.

These delays came hot on the heels of a major victory for Nintendo 64 developers across the world, as the European Economic Community's strict competition laws forced Nintendo to drastically rework its notorious third-party licensing contracts. A press release issued by the EEC stated, "Under the new agreement, there are no longer limits on the number of games that a Nintendo licensee may release on the market, and prior approvals by Nintendo are no longer required, until and unless a Nintendo licensee elects to use a Nintendo trademark for a given game. In addition, the agreement no longer contractually requires that licensees' games be exclusively manufactured by Nintendo."

This issue first came to light during the golden age of NES, when Atari Games formed Tengen, tried to take on Nintendo, and

lost badly. But the EEC carries considerably more clout to dilute the dictatorial policies of Nintendo. Expect this decision to have many effects. First, consumers can expect cheaper games in the U.K., France, and other EEC countries. Second, Nintendo will likely become stingier in granting licensing agreements to third parties in those regions. Finally, expect a grey market to appear if European prices are significantly lower than those in the U.S.



Rare's *Diddy Kong Racing* may be OK, but it's too close to *Mario Kart*, too soon

In the Studio

Development news as it develops

LucasArts has confirmed that it has begun development on games based on the Lucasfilm prequels to the *Star Wars* trilogy. *Episode I* of the prequel films has already begun shooting on a locked-down set in London's Leavesden Studios. The games will be developed as cross-platform, for consoles and PC, and are expected to be available close to the launch of the first film, estimated to be released in May of 1999. It is unknown what genre

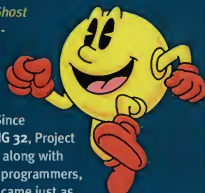


Designed for use in the upcoming *Star Wars Episode I*, this tank could very well be seen in a game

these games will fall into, or if the console versions will appear on Sony's or Sega's next systems, which are likely to release within the same time frame.

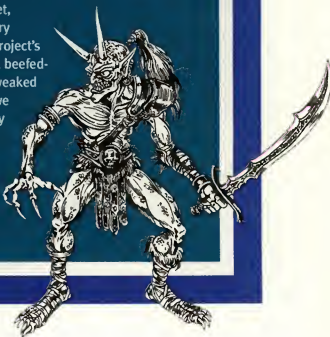
Changes on *Pac-Man: Ghost Zone*

Namco's first U.S.-developed PlayStation title, have delayed the project past Christmas for a release sometime later in '98. Since its premier preview in NG 32, Project Manager Bill Anderson, along with many of the artists and programmers, have been laid off. This came just as Jesse Taylor, most recently at Virgin Interactive, began his tenure as Namco Hometek's new director of research and development. A spokesperson for the company reaffirmed that much of the original team is still in place, and because *Pac-Man* is Namco's corporate icon, the company needs the extra time to absolutely make sure the product is a strong one.



As reported last issue, Vancouver-based Radical Entertainment has set up an office in San Francisco. While the company failed to make a formal announcement before press time, reliable word in the development community was that Radical would announce some type of publishing partnership with Disney Interactive. This would certainly end the company's current development deals with other publishers, specifically Virgin Interactive on the *NHL Powerplay* series.

Diablo 2 is under development for a Q1 1998 launch, according to Blizzard. Although no screens are available yet, we do have a preliminary character sketch. The project's main changes include a beefed-up one-player mode, tweaked graphics engine, and, we hope, a cheat-proof way of playing over Battle.net, Blizzard's proprietary online gaming service. Watch for details in a future issue.



ng

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breaking

Gadget

Adrenaline Rush

Price:	\$215
Manufacturer:	Jazz Multimedia
System:	PC

Jazz Multimedia's Adrenaline Rush card is the second major card (after the Stingray 128/3D from Hercules) to pair the Alliance ProMotion AT3D 2D/3D graphics with the 3Dfx Voodoo Rush chipset. The board offers an efficient and high-performance alternative to the standard two card 3Dfx setup.

The Rush chip was designed from the beginning to work together with 2D chipsets for a complete 2D/3D solution. Because of the shared frame buffer, the chipset can perform a few tricks that the standard Voodoo Graphics can't, such as 3D acceleration in a window. However, according to 3Dfx, Rush offers no performance-related increases over the original. And indeed, the card we tested

offered comparable performance in 3D acceleration.

On the other hand, Voodoo Rush is not fully compatible with the original Voodoo Graphics either, and many games are not yet ready for the chipset. While patches for most of these titles are on the way, and native support will be included with newer games, players may find themselves occasionally frustrated by incompatibilities with older 3Dfx-native titles they already own or plan to buy. Direct3D games, however, like *Moto Racer GP*, will still run extremely well on the card, giving players a bit of a wider assortment of software to choose from.

But perhaps the best advantage of this card is Jazz Multimedia's pricing strategy. The complete 2D/3D card carries a \$215 suggested retail price, but that's likely to drop below \$200 once it hits the streets. To add to the bargain, three major titles will be packed in with the card: *Turok: Dinosaurs Hunter*, *MechWarrior 2 Mercenaries*, and *Interstate '76*.



Jazz Multimedia's Adrenaline Rush board offers affordable 2D and 3D acceleration on one card

Compared to its immediate competitor, the Hercules Stingray 128/3D, the Adrenaline Rush offers slightly better performance and better drivers at a lower price point. For those looking at an affordable single card solution, Jazz Multimedia just may have the answer.

Eagle Max

Price:	\$39
Manufacturer:	Act Labs
System:	PlayStation

Leaping into the analog race, Act Labs has released the Eagle Max, the first third-party joystick compatible with Sony's dual analog joystick standard. And as anyone who reads *Next Generation* might expect, clearly we're excited by any new such controller. However, after taking the stick for a quick spin, we're left feeling somewhat limited.

On the up side, the Eagle Max offers three modes of operation: analog, digital, and "wheel," with the latter being a separate analog mode, which is customized for using the stick as a steering wheel in driving games. It features four user-programmable buttons, which can store button combos



Act Labs' Eagle Max analog joystick is great for flight sim fans - everyone else can steer clear

of up to 16 moves, and players can program in four different sets of combos for four different games, and select

between them at the flip of a switch. Programming is straightforward in concept if a bit clunky in execution, since users have to hold the button-joystick position, then press another button to record it. For certain complex combinations, a friend may be required to tap the entry button.

For all the bells and whistles, however, the Eagle Max is clearly intended for flight game enthusiasts and almost no one else. The left-hand stick on the Sony dual analog pad is replaced here by a throttle wheel and rocker arm, which take over the individual functions of up-down and left-right, respectively. This is a fine configuration for compatible flight games, but obviously not much good for just about any other kind of game that uses two analog sticks (including Shiny Entertainment's forthcoming RC helicopter sim, *Fly by Wire*). Of course, if all you're looking for is a standard flight stick, that may not be a bad thing.

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Toolbox

The products that build your favorite games

3D Studio MAX R2

To say that 3D Studio MAX has had a large impact on the game industry is a bit like saying the Pacific is a large ocean. Upon its release in April of last year, it quickly became one of the most popular — some would argue the most popular — 3D modeling and animation package among game artists and designers. And with good reason: It remains among the most flexible and full-featured 3D programs available, and at \$3,495 per license, can be had for less than half the price of its closest competitor, Microsoft's Softimage.

For version R2, the programmers of Kinetix have added "over a thousand new features and enhancements," small and large. The user interface looks essentially the same but adds a few important tweaks like additional call-out submenus and the ability to customize display colors. Overall, R2 display screens offer the general impression of giving more information and a greater wealth of options. The Materials Editor, for example, now enables the user to work on 24 materials at a time, up from six in the original MAX — saving no end of time shuffling materials in and out — and adds the capability to drag and drop textures and materials directly onto objects within the scene.

MAX R2 expands on so many features from the original, there's simply no way to list them all. A few highlights: A new class of "enhanced" geometric primitives have been added, including things like doors and windows. A much more comprehensive set of particle generators can be

selected, and user-defined geometry can be substituted for particles (ever seen a fountain that sprayed elephants?). New video effects, including various kinds of glowing halos and a pretty comprehensive lens flare system — the special effect most in vogue right now — have been added to post processing.

The most important and exciting additions, however, add completely new functionality. MAX R2 supports NURBS surfaces and editing, previously available only as a plug-in. Further, polygonal primitives can be converted into NURBS and joined with other NURBS surfaces.

R2 also adds raytracing to its scanline renderer. However, what makes it truly interesting is that it's a selective raytracer — "raytrace" is a material or texture type that is mapped onto individual objects and can be controlled and modified like any other material. This gives the user a great deal of flexibility in creating reflective or transparent objects. Also, in addition to Phong shading, R2 supports Blinn shading.

On the animation side, R2 includes a new dynamics engine, a well-integrated and functional physics model for automating collision detection, bouncing, sliding, and so on. Although traditional keyframing is, of course, always an option, it's a kick to set up a system of objects, add gravity, and see what happens.

Which brings us to the single most "gee-whiz" feature of MAX R2: MAXScript. MAXScript is R2's new scripting language, similar in syntax to USP, which can be used to control any function within the program. At its base level,

With Kinetix's latest rev of its popular 3D modeling and animation package, the best just got better



Westwood used 3D Studio MAX to create most of the art for *Blade Runner*



Rezn's *Super Bowl Opening* (top). Reality Works' *Mechanical Bug* (above left) uses MAX R2's new NURBS surfaces. Berlin and Manahan's *The Vortex* (above right) shows raytracing

this allows users to create macros, so for example, the steps of creating a complex shape can be preprogrammed and assigned to a single button stroke. However, a demo AVI showed to **Next Generation** used a MAXScript routine to perform edge detection within a videotaped scene, then used this to position a 3D model within the scene. The possibilities are endless and a bit mind-boggling.

In the end, there simply isn't enough room on this page to cover just what's new in MAX R2, much less every feature included in the package. Suffice it to say, 3D Studio MAX R2 is one of the most comprehensive, full-featured, flexible, and easy-to-use (relatively speaking, of course — as with any package this complex, learning to navigate can take time. However, it's as easy as it can be, which says a lot) 3D modeling and animation packages available. Get the picture?

ng

Visit **Next Generation Online**, the #1 computer and videogame web site at <http://www.next-generation.com/>

Joyriding

Gaming on the Internet

Back in 1993, if you wanted to play fast-paced multiplayer games, the only way to do it was over a LAN, and the game to play was, of course, *Doom*. It was the multiplayer gaming explosion started by *Doom* that caused Bob Huntley to take a look at the potential of multiplayer games as a "replacement for television." To this end, he used the most accessible technologies available to form Dwango (Dial-up Wide Area Network Gaming Online). "I like being in the market first, as long as I'm not

help Dwango with a tailored version of *Quake*, Dwango has hired the same person that made *Doom* run on Dwango to do the necessary network code modifications to the ultra-popular game.

Dwango is betting heavily on its partnership with Microsoft's Internet Gaming Zone. Huntley explained the partnership's strategy as a three-tiered approach. The first level is "free gaming," where matching for retail games is provided for free as are simple games like cards and checkers. A current

by **Christian Svensson**

Christian Svensson is the editor of **Next Generation Online**



With key partners like Microsoft, the online gaming pioneer is likely to rise again

too early," says Huntley. Unfortunately, Dwango may have indeed been just a little too early, and in the face of exclusive grabbing services like TEN, it is already seen by some as a "has been." But with key partners like Microsoft, the online gaming pioneer may still become a major player.

Dwango's strategy was to set up game servers in major markets around the country that people dial into to play games like *Doom* and *Descent*. But since the launch of the service, there has been little content added, despite Dwango's expansion into Japan, Singapore, and soon Korea and England.

"Admittedly, we've gotten a little stale in the last year or so. We've been focusing on more of the technology than on the content for now, but that's going to change soon," says Huntley. "At the time we started it, we didn't predict the explosion of the Net. At the same time, by staying with our path, we don't have a lot of the problems associated with TCP/IP." The problems Huntley is primarily referring to involve competition for bandwidth and issues of latency. By using the telephone system as its means of entry and transmission, Dwango offers local players guaranteed latencies of about 70ms (or less), says Huntley. Comparing that to the average online gaming service, which would consider 150ms latency outstanding performance, it should be apparent that what Dwango currently lacks in content, it has so far made up for in performance.

On the content side, Huntley says that *Quake* will be up and running on Dwango by the end of the year. Other content deals, resulting from a part of its agreement with Microsoft's Internet Gaming Zone, are also supposedly well in the works. Since Id Software hasn't had the time or inclination to



Microsoft currently faces the same problem as Dwango: no killer content

example of this setup is the Zone's support of LucasArts' *X-Wing* vs. *TIE Fighter*. The second tier is the online-only content like Microsoft's forthcoming *Fighter Ace* and *Asheron's Call*. Players are billed for these games. The third and final tier, which is where Dwango fits in, is a premium performance network where an hourly charge is assessed for usage.

Huntley estimates that Dwango will be profitable if as few as 50,000 users are driven to the service via the Zone. Unlike TEN or MPlayer, Dwango has few employees and low fixed costs thanks to a meager network infrastructure (each of the local servers is stand-alone and not interconnected). Says Huntley: "If we can capture 10% of the Zone's membership we would be happy." Microsoft currently touts more than 350,000 registered users, which would make it the front-runner

in terms of user base among major online services. Still, Microsoft currently faces the same problem as Dwango: no killer content — a problem that both Microsoft and Huntley promise is being addressed. But Huntley isn't convinced that any service (or the industry as a whole) has the "proper" content just yet. "The content has to mature," says Huntley. "If content drives the audience size, it's going to take some time still before the developers actually catch up."

Dwango's newest revenue plan kills its subscription model and reverts back to an hourly charge of 99 cents. Given Engage's recent difficulties convincing its audience to pay an hourly rate, even with decent content (e.g., *Warcraft 2*) and equally powerful partners (AOL, EarthLink, CompuServe), what makes Huntley think Dwango can make it work? According to Huntley, it all comes down to performance. "With our lower latencies we can take advantage of DirectPlay's [the networking API for Microsoft's DirectX] broadcasting modes, allowing us to add more players while still offering superior

performance." Dwango hopes to demonstrate these capabilities with forthcoming racing games (which typically need sub-100ms latencies to be playable), like Microsoft's CART title and possible Sega racers like *Daytona Deluxe*.

Looking to the future, Huntley hopes to establish Dwango as a "leader in realtime game play networks," culminating in the interconnection of its servers (for nationwide gameplay and chat) within the next two years. Time will tell how successful Dwango becomes in the face of its TCP/IP-based competitors and its current trans-Atlantic rival, British Telecom's Wireplay. But with partners like Microsoft footing much of the marketing bill as well as providing clout for obtaining content, it's likely to be some time, if ever, before we see Dwango turn tail and run.



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Movers and Shakers

The business news that affects the games you play



Welcome to a media event, courtesy of Sony Computer Entertainment America. No fault to SCEA for publicizing the early launch of *FFVII*, but shame on anyone who reported it as real news



by Colin Campbell

Colin Campbell is Next Generation's international correspondent



The press vs. spin doctors

It is a good thing for Sony that the game press is, on the whole, so gloriously gullible. The recent spectacle of the game media swallowing the story of its "shocking decision" to release *Final Fantasy VII* into the market a few days early due to crushing demand was a sign of these topsy-turvy times. Dim-witted and lazy auto-hackery is now the norm among game journals who are paid to be skeptical.

We were supposed to believe that Sony's heroic decision to let us get at our copies of *Final Fantasy VII* a few days early was due to bone-crunching public demand. Very few had the gall to point out that the whole thing was probably cooked up well in advance, with the express aim not so much of satisfying public demand, but instead, generating more of it.

There is nothing wrong with attempting to manipulate the media. Sony's media manhandlers cannot be blamed for doing what they are paid to do. But the media should be asking questions of themselves for singularly failing to say: "Hang on. Is this really what it seems? Is there an angle here we are missing?"

OK, so a few games hitting homers a couple of days early is not the material for budding Pulitzer Prize winners. There are more important things in the world to worry about. But since we're talking about the business of games, let's at least try to get it right, and not just in this instance, but in all press coverage.

One publicity person has been quoted (off the record, naturally) as stating that the companies he represents are more important than the press and therefore, the press should be more respectful. As a game consumer, you should not care so much for the fates of game writers (who all enjoy a pretty comfortable

existence) as much as the knock-on effect this self-important attitude has for the public.

The bottom line here is that journalists represent the consumer. They make judgments on behalf of their readers. If they are not an independent press and a free-thinking press, they are cheating the people who have allowed them to enjoy pretty damned good jobs. If they are too cowed to ask damaging questions or reveal inside information, they are not fulfilling their function. If they will happily reprint the sly concoctions of PR folk, they might just as well be honest with themselves and go work for a hardware manufacturer or software house.

The first people in positions of power to stand up and say, "I believe in a free press as much as the next person," are almost always the very same people who call up magazine editors trying to get damaging reviews or news stories pulled. Software publishers, without exception, are not in the business of truth and justice. They are in the business of selling games. Frankly, they are not to be trusted.

But game writers are in the business of getting their magazines sold, and the only way to do that in the long term is to earn the trust of their readers. Readers are more clever than marketing types give them credit for. Sooner or later they know when they are being fooled. They will only buy so many concocted events or overly careful reviews. They will not tolerate a media that allow themselves to be so easily used.

From the biggest game review to the smallest PR-generated story, the game press should always behave as representatives of the public. There is no cozy compromise here. No give and take. They should not give a stuff for the interests of greedy shareholders or Machiavellian marketing mandarins.

Sega vs. 3Dfx

When hardware manufacturers go to war, lawyers can look forward to up to a decade's worth of business. Whether it's Atari or Nintendo or Microsoft or Apple, the result is always the same — long, drawn out, and extremely complicated.

Software publishers argue about interesting stuff like how such and such a platform-leaping squirrel is related to such and such a vine-swinging hippo. But hardware folk argue about perplexing engineering stuff.

The software folk get over their tiffs within six months. It often turns out that the hippo and the squirrel are in no way involved and that the whole thing was a silly misunderstanding. In hardware, it takes longer. Sega's response to 3Dfx's lawsuit could be even more complicated than usual because Sega, hilariously, owns a significant chunk of 3Dfx.

What happens at the 3Dfx shareholder meetings? Does Mr. Ballard nervously shuffle in his chair when the subject of Sega comes around? "I'm terribly sorry, Mr. Stolar. Do you think you could just go make some coffee while we work out how to wiring millions of dollars out of your company?" What does Stolar say? "That's quite all right, buddy. Milk and two sugars?" Come to think of it, this rumble might turn out to be quite a laugh.

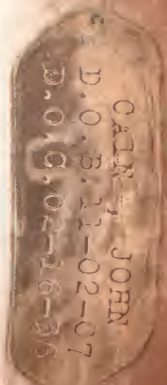
Lara Croft: social degenerate

And finally, the last word on videogames this month goes to Dr. Tom Shakespeare, as quoted in a recent edition of London's *Guardian*: "Videogames are a symptom, not the cause, of social degeneration. The triumph of *Tomb Raider*'s Lara Croft and Mario the Plumber is part of the tendency towards the privatized, consumerist postmodern condition that is reflected in many other areas of life."

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Arcadia

The latest arcade and coin-op news

Mortal Kombat 4 takes U.S. by storm

Manufacturers aren't supposed to pick favorites among new games, just as mothers aren't supposed to pick favorites among their children. Still, the folks at Midway Mfg. find themselves beaming just a bit more broadly when they talk about *Mortal Kombat 4*, the latest entry in this hit series. As every gamer in the world must know by now, the two-player video upright features the debut of Midway's "Zeus" chip, which generates 1.2 million polygons per second ... a performance that makes it "ten times more powerful than Nintendo 64," according to Midway execs. The result: awesome 3D texture-mapped graphics and complex gameplay that achieve new heights of realism.

Players will also like the introduction of weapons into combat — axes, maces, you name it. One character can lose his weapon and the opponent can pick it up and use it against him. Violence? Even a brief tryout yields blood, spine breaking, limb mangling, and so on. But that's been part of the appeal of the game ever since the first *Mortal Kombat*. You don't really expect creators Boon & Tobias to abandon a winning formula now, do you?

The game's preview tour of 25 cities around the country during July and August drew huge crowds of excited players, who waited in line for hours to play. The tour also generated more than a dozen, all positive stories on local TV newscasts, plus a frenzy of player interest on the Internet (more than half a million "hits" a day to the *MK4* web site).

When asked when *MK4* is going to the home market, factory execs replied: "Right now, there aren't even any plans to take it to the home market. Our new Zeus chip is so far ahead of the

technology of home video that translating it eventually to any of the home platforms could prove something of a challenge."

Next up: Off-Road Challenge

Dazzling as it is, *MK4* doesn't quite grab ALL the glory at Midway Mfg. these days. A new sit-down driving simulator called *Off-Road Challenge* is the first arcade game to come out of the old Cinematronics/Leland Corp. office in San Diego since it was acquired a few years back by WMS/Midway. (John Rowe and his California crew have been busy churning out home game hits ever since.) Midway designers, led by Mike Hunley, sought to blend the heritage of two previous hits. *Off-Road Challenge* brings players the unique combination of fantasy and reality seen in *Cruisin'* mixed with the theme and action of the original *Off-Road*. The game is housed in what Midway now calls "our standard driving cabinet" — previously seen in *Cruisin' World* and *San Francisco Rush*.

Konami launches Solar Assault

August saw a new effort by Konami to challenge Sega and Nintendo in the deluxe simulator arena. *Solar Assault* puts you in the cockpit of an advanced star fighter. Your mission is to defend the planet Gradius against all manner of strange enemies. First-person POV 3D graphics give you a nonstop series of weird and wonderful targets to shoot at, and gameplay carefully graduates the speed and intensity of enemy action as you progress through five stages. The tension never lets up! Players use a joystick equipped with a trigger and missile button to interact with the 50-inch screen. Coming later from Konami will be

by **Marcus Webb**

Marcus Webb is the editor of *RePlay* magazine



Racin' Jam, the first U.S. release to use its million-polygons-per-second "Cobra" hardware platform, produced as a joint venture with IBM. Japan's first "Cobra" arcade game is a number called *Fighting Wu-Shu*, but there's been some question of how (or if) to present it to the U.S. market.

CD-ROM games arrive in arcades

Whoops! While the arcade game manufacturers and arcade operators argue about whether CD-ROM-based games will work in arcades, a few such titles have quietly been slipped into the lineup unannounced. Capcom's *Three* (or as pedestrians call it, *Street Fighter 3*) was the first one we know of, and Konami's *Total Vice* was the second ... but far from the last. Konami says it has more CD-ROM-based arcade games on the way. We also hear that Sega and Namco may be working on similar CD-ROM-based proprietary systems for arcade game use. As Arcadia readers know, arcade owners — allied with groups like the National Amusement Network, Intel, and Microsoft — have been calling for a universally "open" PC-based platform that can present CD-ROM-based games from numerous sources.

Iwerks, Showscan to merge

Is it a game or a ride? The line between the two formats sometimes blurs a bit at Iwerks Entertainment and Showscan Entertainment. Meanwhile, the line between the two companies themselves has disappeared completely. It was announced August 5 that they have signed a definitive agreement to merge. The merger will bring together the two largest motion simulation companies, making them the world's largest provider of ride simulation entertainment attractions and software. When the dust settles, Showscan will become a wholly owned subsidiary of Iwerks. As a result of the merger, the combined company will have more than 160 simulation theaters, which is the largest installed base of simulation theaters in the world, plus a library of more than 60 ride simulation titles, including the critically acclaimed *Devil's Mine Ride* and *Cosmic Pinball* from the Showscan 28-title library and *Dino Island* and *Secrets of the Lost Temple* from Iwerks' 40-title library.



Konami's marketing pro Mary Hermanson at the helm and President "Smilin' Mike" Rudowicz at right

Retroview

Anecdotes from computer and videogaming's past

The Owen Rubin Memorial Gameroom

Owen Rubin holds a dubious record in the history of Atari Coin-op — the longest streak of unshipped games. Designers like Ed Logg (*Asteroids*, *Centipede*, *Gauntlet*), Dave Theurer (*Missile Command*, *Tempest*), and John Salwitz (*Paperboy*, *Rampart*) used to refer to games that never shipped as being "in the Owen Rubin Memorial Gameroom."

Rubin's greatest contribution to videogames, however, may have been a game called *Tunnel Hunt* — a game that might have been better off had it been relegated to the Memorial Gameroom.

After seeing the docking scene in the movie *Alien* in 1979, Rubin got an idea for a game in which players flew a spaceship through tunnels. In those days, designers used vector graphics (a graphics generator that draws shapes with lines — *Battlezone*, *Asteroids*, and *Star Wars* were vector games) when they needed high-speed and

high-resolution images, so Rubin decided to do *Tunnel Hunt* with vector graphics.

The first time he made the game, he created square tunnels. It didn't look very good. Then David Sherman, another coin-op employee, suggested redoing the game with a new generator that could make an ellipsis.

Dave said, "I've got this great hardware that does ellipsis."

So we redid it in ellipsis. We're about the end of 1980 by this time.

It looked really cool. You flew down these tunnels and they split, you know, there were forks, and you had to make decisions at the last minute or you would hit the walls. It was actually

by **Steven Kent**

A frequent contributor to *Next Generation*, Steven Kent is the author of a forthcoming book on the history of videogames



going to sell the game." I thought he meant they were going to manufacture it. They had decided they were going to sell the game intact to Exidy.

— Owen Rubin

In 1982, Exidy Games, the company that made *Death Race 98* and *Crossbow*, offered to

Tunnel Hunt, a very good game at its conception, ended up a dog when it finally shipped



a fun game.

And then they [the managers] said, "Oh, the hardware is too expensive," so they canned it.

— Owen Rubin

But *Tunnel Hunt* was not ready to die. Sherman suggested less expensive vector hardware that generated circles. It was late 1981 by the time Rubin finished rebuilding *Tunnel Hunt* with round tunnels. When Atari placed the game in a local arcade to judge player reaction, it consistently had the second highest coin drop in the arcade.

Management, however, decided that the circle generator was too expensive, so Rubin remade the game with square tunnels. In 1982, Atari tested *Tunnel Hunt* in a Seattle suburb. Though it still scored well with customers, Rubin's managers kept asking for minor changes. Ed Rotberg began calling *Tunnel Hunt* "the game that would not die."

I began working on Tunnel Hunt in late '78. By this time it was probably late '81 or early '82, and we were doing another version of it when they finally shelved it. They put it aside, so I started on Major Havoc.

— Owen Rubin

But by this time, *Tunnel Hunt* had a life of its own. Skip Paul, the head of Atari Coin-op, called Rubin into his office.

I got a call from Skip Paul, who said, "Well, we're

buy *Tunnel Hunt* and rename it *Vertigo*. Though the game still did well at a test site, Exidy eventually backed out, and a Florida-based company called Centuri (the company that imported *Time Pilot*) bought the game.

By the time it reached the arcades, however, *Tunnel Hunt* was five years old and looked hopelessly outdated. Centuri ended up with a bomb on its hands, and *Tunnel Hunt*, a very good game at its conception, ended up a dog when it finally shipped.

But Rubin (who, by the way, is still quite alive and a fellow at Apple) deserves to be remembered for more than Atari's longest losing streak. He created *Major Havoc*, one of the best vector games of all time. More than that though, during all that time he spent creating games that didn't ship, he helped, maybe more than any single individual, to shape the zeitgeist of Atari Coin-op. For instance, Rubin constantly bugged Ed Rotberg (with whom he shared an office), about making the volcano in the background of *Battlezone* active. Finally, Rotberg got fed up and told Rubin that if he wanted the volcano to erupt, he could do the code. The next morning, Rotberg came in to find a new code listing on his chair and the volcano erupting onscreen.

Rubin was also active in the numerous practical jokes that characterized life at Atari Coin-op during its heyday.

Although few gamers remember his name, Owen Rubin was an integral member of the Atari team that produced some of the greatest arcade games of all time.



Atari's *S.T.U.N. Runner* (top) bears an eerie resemblance to *Tunnel Hunt*. *Major Havoc* (above), one of Rubin's few completed games

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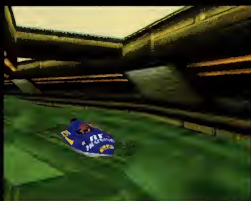
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25 breakthrough games

A guide to the **next
level** in **videogames**

ng special

Battlezone

See NG 34

What's the game? Activision is no stranger to the ways of revamped classics, but *Battlezone* may well be its most exciting update yet. The original game's tank combat is updated with an impressive realtime strategy aspect, and one of the most innovative and intuitive interfaces in years.

What's the big deal? By using an innovative radar display, the team has managed to meld the first-person action of a fantasy sim like

MechWarrior to the situational awareness of a realtime strategy game like *Command & Conquer*. Combining action with another genre has resulted in some killer titles (action + adventure = *Tomb Raider*; action + RPG = *Diablo*). When done right, that is. Remember *Ninja Golf* or Hudson's tennis/role-playing game on Turbo Grafx? (We didn't think so.) Activision seems to be doing it right; the game also features an impressive resource and play-balancing scheme that ensures players will

Format:	PC
Publisher:	Activision
Developer:	Activision
Release Date:	Q1 1998

need to play the game as a true hybrid, not just as an action game with some strategy elements or vice versa.

Predicted effect: Two things. First, expect the action/realtime strategy game to become the next clone haven (with liberal borrowing of the game's radar concept). Second, this game will be very hard to duplicate on today's consoles; the balance of innovation is swinging back to the PC from the current generation of consoles.



Blade Runner

What's the game? Even after 15 years, *Blade Runner* still stands as one of the quintessential sci-fi movies. Considering the richness of the setting, it seems almost impossible that we've had to wait this long for a game. But Westwood's upcoming adventure game may just prove to be worth the wait.

What's the big deal? First, *Blade Runner* happens in real time in a 640x480 true color 3D world, and the game actually manages to do justice to the stunning visuals of the film.

What's more important, though, are the revolutionary "virtual actors." Unlike most adventure games, where characters interact with the player only at specific moments and in limited ways, *BR* supports a cast of characters that move about on their own, in real time, with or without the player's help (or knowledge). A realtime approach to adventures has been tried unsuccessfully in FMV bombs like *Psychic Detective*, but never to this extent; NPCs have their own AI agendas to pursue, and they can be altered by the player's actions. Designing the

Format:	PC
Publisher:	Virgin Interactive
Developer:	Westwood Studios
Release Date:	TBA

game in this way creates a situation where the game is different every time (especially considering that just who is or isn't a replicant, and those characters' subsequent behavior, can change each time you play)—a goal that many strive for but few have reached.

Predicted effect: After *Blade Runner*, few gamers will be satisfied with the standard, 2D, point-and-click-and-wait fare that has been the state of the art in adventures since the death of the text parser.



Burning Rangers

What's the game? From Yuji Naka, the man who brought us *Sonic and Nights*, comes a new and thoroughly innovative action/adventure game starring two young firefighters equipped with concussion bombs and jet packs. The idea is simple yet unique — enter burning buildings and rescue helpless victims while battling fires and powerful enemy characters strewn throughout the levels.

What's the big deal? *Burning Rangers*

exemplifies exactly the kind of innovative thinking that is missing in the majority of contemporary gameplay design. On a system that could easily have been allowed to fade away with a string of tried and tested (and tired) titles, the *Sonic* team is anxious to continue stretching the bounds of game design with an untested gameplay model featuring impressive technological feats, including a heavy reliance on sound in the form of vocal cues and carefully intertwined lighting effects that not only look

Format:	Saturn
Publisher:	Sega
Developer:	Sega (Sonic Team)
Release Date:	TBA

good but actually enhance gameplay.

Predicted effect: As Saturn nears the end of its life cycle, Sega fans will be reassured by the company's commitment to delivering quality games. And though no game, including *Burning Rangers*, could possibly save Saturn now, the game shows that 3D titles don't have to be *Mario* clones (ahem, Rare), and that Sega is still a serious force to be reckoned with on the software front.



Die by the Sword

See NG 33

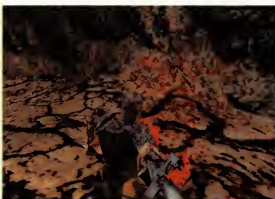
What's the game? *Die by the Sword* will inevitably be dubbed a *Tomb Raider*-style game, thanks to its fluid animation, third-person perspective, and adventure elements (which lean more to the fantasy RPG side than *Tomb Raider*), but where the game differs is in its advanced fighting control.

What's the big deal? Although *Die by the Sword* is just one in what is sure to be a long line of action/adventure games for PC, it makes this list because of its melee battle

model. Thanks to an advanced physics model that does away with the need for traditional motion capture, and an innovative and intuitive control scheme (using the numeric key pad to aim sword strokes at various target areas on the enemies' bodies), players will have more control over their characters' fighting ability than ever seen before, even when compared to weapons sims like *Bushido Blade*. And the physics model ensures that heads, arms, and legs will all fly realistically off — snaring gore-seeking gamers with ease.

Format:	PC
Publisher:	Interplay
Developer:	Treyarch
Release Date:	December 1997

Predicted effect: Thanks to the success Eidos found with *Tomb Raider* last year, *Die by the Sword* will not be alone in the third-person adventure genre this holiday season. It should stand out of the pack because of its control and deep storyline. More importantly, however, the game's control scheme may effectively mark the beginning of the end for canned motion captured sequences in action games. They simply cannot provide the variety of motions needed for realtime, unscripted, sword-to-sword combat.



ng special

FireTeam

See NG 33

What's the game? The online-only *FireTeam* offers realtime, multiplayer, squad-level combat with real voice communications over a standard modem (a microphone is included in the package).

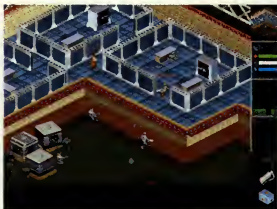
What's the big deal? Because individual *FireTeam* engagements are relatively short, it doesn't require the kind of hard-core commitment of, say, *Ultima Online*, making it not only more instantly gratifying, but also more

accessible to the casual gamer. The voice communications system reinforces the notion of "multiplayer," and enables easier communication than trying to type a message while playing. Also, *FireTeam* allows for constantly new and different battlefields and mission objectives to keep the game from stagnating — everything from a *Jurassic Park*-like dinos vs. hunters game to a re-creation of the Peruvian hostage rescue scenario. The company is committed to supporting a true

Format:	Online
Publisher:	Multitude
Developer:	Multitude
Release Date:	Winter 1997

online community of devotees, as well.

Predicted effect: By forcing players to talk to each other to succeed, *FireTeam* may well be able to engender a community without creating an expensive, hard-to-modify, persistent world. Many companies are trying to follow *Ultima Online*'s lead; by taking a different approach — quick games with easily updated scenarios — *FireTeam* may demonstrate the model for getting non-RPGers to play.



Fly by Wire

See NG 34

What's the game? *Fly by Wire* may well be the first game specifically designed to take advantage of a controller. Basically, the game is a hyper-realistic sim of a radio-controlled helicopter — an item whose standard control pad bears a striking similarity to the action of the Sony Dual Analog Controller. Beyond just trying to keep the copter from crashing (a problem the game shares with real RC helicopters) there are various *PilotWings*-like piloting challenges to face.

What's the big deal? Not only is the game totally addictive (every time you play you get a bit better, making the desire to play "just one more time" almost irresistible), but the team that created it numbers a staggering two people. Dave Perry recently admitted that *Fly by Wire* was created to prove that new genres are still waiting to be discovered (and can be exploited by miniscule development teams), and this may well be the most important aspect of the game.

Format:	PlayStation, PC
Publisher:	Interplay
Developer:	Shiny
Release Date:	TBA

Predicted effect: It's difficult to predict what kind of effect a game like *Fly by Wire* could have, beyond saving a lot of people a lot of money on toy helicopter repairs (skills learned in the game transfer amazingly well to the real thing). Best case: It provides a wake-up call to the legions of developers who continue to work only on the tried and true. Worst case: We get a fun and addictive game (and maybe a pack-in for the Analog Controller). Either way, expect Dave Perry's reputation among gamers to continue to improve.



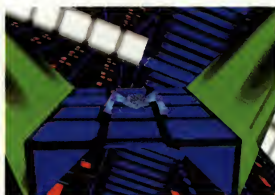
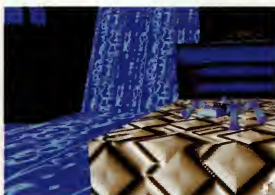
Galapagos

What's the game? Think of a 3D *Lemmings* with only one lemming, and you've got *Galapagos*. The player's job is to help Mendel, a four-legged insectoid, escape from the clutches of an evil corporation. The problem is, Mendel moves wherever he wants, and the only way to prevent his death is to manipulate the environment around him. This is done by raising bridges, moving blocks, and launching Mendel into the air from special platforms. In this way, *Galapagos* is more of a game than other recent Artificial Life experiments.

What's the big deal? While the default setting in the game begins Mendel's life at seven hours old for ease of use, it's far more amazing to watch him from birth. At this stage Mendel has to be taught everything, including how to walk. When he does learn to walk he repeatedly careens over the side of chasms or steps on lethal energy barriers until he learns that these things spell doom. All this is possible through technology known as NERM (Non-stationary Entropic Reduction Mapping), which makes for some interesting personality

permutations. If Mendel gets harmed too often, his behavior will become increasingly unstable, to the point where he can no longer walk straight.

Predicted effect: Games like *Galapagos* ordinarily don't spawn imitations, just as the original *Lemmings* is pretty much the only game of its genre. However, its highly advanced Artificial Life program could be easily translated to any game; this sort of AI in a football game would be something to see.



G.Police

See NG 31

What's the game? Since the days of *Pole Position*, gamers have always wanted to get to the "city in the distance" and play amidst a real downtown landscape. Psygnosis is the first game to really deliver that experience in its jaw-dropping new 3D shooter. The player pilots a futuristic helicopter on a series of missions within a beautiful futuristic city landscape.

What's the big deal? There has been a great deal of attention given lately to the new 3D

acceleration cards, and though many of the games utilizing these cards have indeed looked great, none has managed to push the graphical limits as far as *G.Police*. As part of the overall impact of the game, *G.Police* features the signature Psygnosis presentation, complete with futuristic fonts, Euro-techno tracks, and a generally hip artistic sense throughout. Although these elements have all been seen before in the *Wipeout* series and others, they still manage to seem no less fresh in *G.Police*. The game also includes a rich

backstory told through an impressive series of FMV sequences seamlessly integrated into the mission objectives.

Predicted effect: Remember how it was Psygnosis that really showed what PlayStation could do, and how (eventually) other developers caught up? (By which time, of course, Psygnosis was way ahead again.) Expect the same thing to happen on PC while giving the company, in the process, its first original PC megahit.





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Grand Prix Legends

See NG 29

What's the game? Based on the 1967 Grand Prix circuit, a year considered one of the most exciting and dangerous years ever in Formula 1 history, *Grand Prix* is a retro sim with some high-tech development touches. As with all of Papyrus' racing games, realism is the norm for *Grand Prix Legends*.

What's the big deal? Beyond the intriguing concept of revisiting the days when tracks were thin, spectators stood close by, and cars carried

enough gasoline to guarantee a fiery explosion (and usually, a broken body) upon impact, *Grand Prix Legends* enjoys several benefits of an experienced development team. The most impressive aspect of the game is the hyper-realistic 3D physics model that allows for a new level of accuracy in the control and feel of the cars. The game also features 11 accurately modeled tracks from the 1967 circuit, including some that are no longer in existence because of their dangerous reputation, and real drivers

from the late '60s racing era as well.

Predicted effect: Racing sims typically attract a pretty narrow (although extremely loyal) audience, but with *Grand Prix Legends*'s bold mission to recreate one of the more exciting eras in the history of the sport, many non-sim fans just may find themselves drawn to it. More generally, a new era of historical sport sims may be dawning (Accolade's *Legends' Football* is another example of the trend).



Half Life

See NG 32

What's the game? *Half Life* uses a heavily modified version of the *Quake* engine for a first-person game that's part action, part adventure game. Stuck in an abandoned-silo-turned-biological-research-station-run-amok, players will have to think as well as fight to survive.

What's the big deal? Valve may have licensed the *Quake* engine, but the team has modified it to the point where it's

almost unrecognizable. There are a number of new eye-candy features like realtime transparency, chrome surfaces, and colored lighting, but beyond this, Valve has invented a skeletal-based animation system and sophisticated enemy AI so the world not only looks, but acts as realistically as possible. Couple this with scripted events and a continuous storyline that really matters, and you've got a game with both style and substance.

Predicted effect: Although a number of developers are trying to push the first-person action game in the direction of less twitch and more actual thinking and emotional commitment, Valve seems to have come closest to nailing the right formula. As Valve co-founder Gabe Newell says, "It's an active world. It's not about a bunch of things standing around, waiting for you to come along and shoot them." If it hits, look for others to follow suit.





Kinda like reruns. Even more fun the second time around.



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I-War

See NG 34

What's the game? The first offering from the U.K.-based Particle Systems, *I-War* is setting its sights on the genre-defining *Wing Commander* series. Featuring breathtaking prerendered sequences that blend almost seamlessly with actual gameplay, the effect of *I-War* is more like a sci-fi movie than a traditional space shooter.

What's the big deal? One of only a precious few PC titles coming out in the near future to not go the route of the 3D accelerator, *I-War* manages

competitive visual bang in a software-only environment. Also important to note about the game is its depth of gameplay opportunities, which allows individuals to play the game as they please. Whether as a straight space shooter or a deeper strategy experience, *I-War* offers a luxury of freedom not found in most games. What's perhaps a more controversial aspect of the *I-War* story is that the game is being designed as a one-player-only game. In an age where multiplayer is king, Particle Systems has intentionally chosen to focus on

Format:	PC
Publisher:	Ocean
Developer:	Particle Systems
Release Date:	TBA

the single-player experience while holding off on any multiplayer options until development begins on a sequel.

Predicted effect: With most of the attention in the PC arena being given to 3D-accelerated, multiplayer games, *I-War* would seem dangerously close to falling into the "not interested" category. However, it may just be its refusal to go with the crowd that makes the game stand out. If there is a future for single-player, *Elite*-style games, *I-War* will reveal it.



Jedi Knight

See NG 34

What's the game? *Jedi Knight* is the sequel to the 1994 *Dark Forces*, a first-person shooter with as many flaws as highlights, but a general sense of potential throughout. And so LucasArts has set out to give *Jedi Knight* everything that the original lacked, including a better use of the *Star Wars* license, improved graphics, and more thoughtful level design.

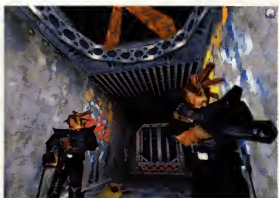
What's the big deal? The biggest concern with any sequel is whether it can sufficiently

improve on the original, and *Jedi Knight* is in line to do just that — moving from bit-mapped sprite enemies to polygon models is only the beginning. What *Jedi Knight* does that no other first-person shooter has managed to do is to make good use of a nonprojectile weapon. Focusing more carefully on the powerful license at its disposal, the team has implemented a new gameplay dynamic through the use of the ultimate weapon in the *Star Wars* universe — the light saber. There is also a unique power-

up system based on both the light and dark side of The Force (which, yes, works hand in hand with the light saber). *Jedi Knight* also incorporates a long list of multiplayer options, a feature sorely missing in the original.

Predicted effect: Competing against *Quake 2* and *Prey* will take more than just level design or a license; expect *Jedi Knight* to show how to do a first-person shooter without making it a derivative clone.

Format:	PC
Publisher:	LucasArts
Developer:	LucasArts
Release Date:	Q1 1998



Mask of Eternity

See NG 30

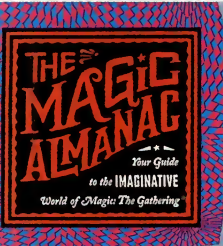
What's the game? The latest in Roberta Williams' *King's Quest* series dumps the static screens and point-and-click interface of traditional graphic adventures in favor of a true 3D environment and polygonal characters.

What's the big deal? While first- and third-person action game developers are struggling to add more thoughtful elements to their shoot-'em-ups, Williams and the

Sierra team are working from exactly the opposite direction — taking traditional graphic adventure values like character development, story, and puzzle solving and making them work in a physical, even gritty, fully interactive 3D world. If indeed *Mask of Eternity* can still truly be called a graphic adventure (and some might argue it isn't), it will be the first one in some years that doesn't require players to point, click, wait, and watch.

Format:	PC
Publisher:	Sierra
Developer:	Sierra
Release Date:	November 1997

Predicted effect: Whether it succeeds or fails (and it's difficult to imagine Williams and company ever completely dropping the ball — even *Phantasmagoria* had its moments), the simple fact that such a high-profile series as *King's Quest* is in the process of reinventing itself so dramatically means the entire adventure game community is watching. Expect the genre to either change forever or stay as it is for a good while longer.



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Messiah

See NG 33

What's the game? Dave Perry is quick to compare the core gameplay model of *Messiah* to that of John Newcomer's 1982 arcade classic *Joust*. Basically, the main character can fly, but not very well, and the game is played by trying to finesse this underdeveloped sense of flight. The gameplay goes far deeper than that of *Joust*, however, and features such innovative touches as bodily possession and the use of projectile weaponry, as the player controls a helpless cherub in a fight against the forces of Satan.



What's the big deal? Shiny's recent success with *MDK* effectively bought it a little freedom from the *Earthworm Jim* niche so many had locked it into. With *Messiah*, the codeshop is taking another giant leap towards redefining itself. More important at this point, however, is the highly advanced character engine employed in the game. Achieving revolutionary polygon counts and amazingly smooth animation for the game's characters and environments is the result of a newly designed engine that instead of limiting the number of polygons, starts with



Format:	PC, PlayStation
Publisher:	Interplay
Developer:	Shiny
Release Date:	Q1 1998

an extremely high number and scales the performance back according to hardware limits.

Predicted effect: "Mr. Perry? It's Senator Lieberman for you." Beyond generating massive amounts of controversy (and publicity), if the game's character engine is half as good as it's claimed to be, it should set the industry on its collective ear. Perry claims to have "finally solved the polygon problem." If that's true, expect to see many imitations of his team's solution (patent or no patent) in coming years.



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ng special

Metal Gear Solid

See NG 31

What's the game? Konami's third-person *Metal Gear Solid* mixes action, adventure, and all-around good looks in one of the most ambitious PlayStation titles yet. A sequel to an early NES game, *Metal Gear Solid* is set in an Alaskan nuclear facility and features a combination of stunning prerendered and realtime 3D environments.

What's the big deal? In an age where the rule on consoles is "make more things blow up,"

Metal Gear Solid replaces mindless action with sophistication and stealth. This is not to say that there are no explosions (there are some fabulous explosions and action sequences), but rather that the game is based on carefully maneuvering a character into a heavily guarded facility using intelligence and a long list of clever and, comparatively speaking, complex devices. *Metal Gear Solid* also boasts a great attention to detail. From the intricately designed environments to small graphic touches like

Format:	PlayStation
Publisher:	Konami
Developer:	Konami
Release Date:	TBA

smoking guns and footprints in the snow, the game is a convincing sell on every level.

Predicted effect: *Metal Gear Solid* will draw comparisons to *Resident Evil*, and will likely do the same thing for Konami that the gothic thriller did for Capcom in both sales and reputation. Expect PlayStation software to start to move, in part, away from mindless violence towards games like 007 that require finesse as well as quick reflexes.



Myth

See NG 27

What's the game? *Myth* offers realtime strategy engagements between armies of mythical creatures. Gameplay is both simple, since there's no resource management or building up of forces, and deep, since combat occurs on a fully 3D, contoured, realistic landscape.

What's the big deal? The simple fact that it's in 3D would instantly set *Myth* apart from the flood of top-down, sprite-based *Command &*

Conquer clones saturating the market. However, the designers' commitment to realistic physics and terrain-dependent battle tactics (granting the fantastic nature of the troops involved, naturally), puts *Myth* in a strategy game class practically by itself. Add in a macabre sense of both style and humor, close attention to tiny details, inventive multiplayer options, and a lot of gore, and it's clear this is a game that deserves all the attention it gets and more.

Format:	Macintosh, PC
Publisher:	Bungie
Developer:	Bungie
Release Date:	Winter 1997

Predicted effect: Hopefully, *Myth* represents a fresh new direction for the already stale and creatively dead realtime strategy genre. Yet it's just similar enough to keep from alienating genre fans, getting them to try it, and letting them discover there's more to winning a battle than just mining gold/tiberium/whatever and sending in waves of attackers. The fact that it should ship simultaneously on the Mac also should show that the OS is still a viable platform for at least a small number of titles.



Prey

See NG 33

What's the game? From the creators of *Duke Nukem 3D* comes a new first-person 3D shooter called *Prey*, with a slightly different approach to spatial relations. Dubbed Portal technology, *Prey* features a series of rooms linked together by portals, as opposed to traditional architectural designs based on walls and halls.

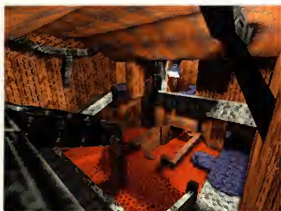
What's the big deal? By featuring Portal technology and committing to being for 3D

accelerators only, *Prey* gets a technological leg up on the competition in terms of rendering efficiency. What's more important, however, are the unique opportunities that come through the use of an untraditional spatial model. By using portals instead of traditional environment layouts, the team can create a much less predictable gameplay dynamic, including such fanciful notions as portals that lead back into the same room (look out the portal into the next room and see your back

Format:	PC
Publisher:	GT Interactive
Developer:	3D Realms
Release Date:	June 1998

looking out the door), and more. Nauseating to some, perhaps, but certainly a step beyond the traditional, expected worlds of *Quake*.

Predicted effect: Gamers are now very familiar with the complex 3D worlds of *Quake*-class titles; they are ready for the more abstract environments promised by the *Prey* technology — what would have been too confusing a year ago can now be accepted. Expect to see space get more warped in the 3D games to come.



Quake 2

See NG 34

What's the game? The original *Quake* probably represents the finest multiplayer action game of all time, but not much as a one-player experience. *Quake 2*, on the other hand, while maintaining and enhancing all that made the multiplayer version great, will make huge strides in improving play for the solitary user.

What's the big deal? The big improvements for *Quake 2* come in the form of graphical

enhancements and include such things as increased polygon counts for enemy characters from 150 to 600, realtime dynamic light sourcing, shadows and transparencies, and a more varied color palette. With 3D acceleration being the norm this time around, these and other visual effects are not expected to be problematic in the slightest. The game will also feature a less tangible but much appreciated focus on the one-player experience.

Format:	PC
Publisher:	Activision
Developer:	Id
Release Date:	November 1997

Predicted effect: Want to know what the bulk of 3D shooters will look like in the months to come? Look no further than this. Beyond just a better *Quake*, so many games will be using the engine that is quickly coming to define the state of the art that it is clearly one of the most important PC releases of the year — companies' fortunes will be made and lost on how well Carmack's latest engine competes with the inevitable rivals to the 3D shooter throne.



ng special

Skies

See NG 32

What's the game? From military sim experts Paradigm, a company that cut its teeth in the game industry with the visually stunning *PilotWings 64*, comes yet another flight-based visual extravaganza. The game features RPG elements in an online, persistent world, action/adventure atmosphere.

What's the big deal? *Skies* features one of the largest and most beautifully realized 3D environments ever seen in a computer game,

making it doubly exciting that the world is persistent and home to multiple players via SegaSoft's Heat network. The gameplay takes place both indoors and out in a world of floating cities a la Lando Calrissian and Cloud City. The game also features an impressive way of illustrating a character's experience level with an actual aging process that can be seen in the character's appearance. Finally, the game makes good use of SegaSoft's Transactor technology, making it possible to

Format:	Online
Publisher:	SegaSoft
Developer:	Paradigm
Release Date:	TBA

buy/sell/trade items, weapons, and even characters with other players over the Net.

Predicted effect: Think every persistent world needs to be set in the Middle Ages? Think again. On setting and character design alone, *Skies* deserves to be on this list; there simply has not ever been a game before that features anything like these characters doing these things. Although there will probably be some in the future ...



StarCraft

See NG 23

What's the game? After helping to usher in the age of the realtime strategy game with *Warcraft 2*, Blizzard set to work on what will likely represent the next level in the genre. *StarCraft* picks up where other realtime strategy games leave off, with deeper mission objectives (even in multiplayer), more sophisticated play balancing, and a graphic edge over the competition.

What's the big deal? With the experience of designing one of the greatest realtime

strategy games already behind them, the developers at Blizzard have been able to focus on the finer points of the genre and the new possibilities therein. Unlike the legions of cloners ("Yeah, it's like *Warcraft*, only this unit is an Urk, and it is a little different from an Orc"), Blizzard actually innovates when it develops a new product — the game features a new approach to rendering characters and an isometric view to enhance the visual depth of the playing field. Finally, the game was specifically designed to work with Blizzard's

Format:	PC
Publisher:	Blizzard
Developer:	Blizzard
Release Date:	December 1997

own Battle.net, a free multiplayer online service. (And this time, there will be no cheating!)

Predicted effect: Although we're tempted to say, "Watch the cloners try to play catch-up," even the most dense developers must surely sense that this is an overcrowded genre. So look for Blizzard and Westwood to weather the current storm of clones and continue to dominate — and innovate — in the genre they helped create.



10^{Six}

See page 110

What's the game? *10^{Six}* combines the first-person perspective of the action/shooter genre with realtime strategy gameplay in a multiplayer battle for land and resources. The game will run exclusively on SegaSoft's Heat network and will support up to one million players (10 to the 6th power).

What's the big deal? Beyond the fact that the game supports up to one million players in a persistent universe, *10^{Six}* features SegaSoft's

exclusive Transactor technology, wherein objects in the game are specifically encoded so that they may be traded, bought, sold, or stolen. Protected by high-level encryption techniques, the Transactor items include everything from power-ups to new attack vehicles. Also, the persistent nature of the universe and the consequent need to protect personal holdings will force players to band together like never before in a multiplayer environment.

Format:	Online
Publisher:	SegaSoft
Developer:	PostLinear
Release Date:	Q1 1998

Predicted effect: The persistent universe in *10^{Six}* is an exciting proposition, to say the least. What will happen when one million players start implementing different strategies and gameplay schedules is really anyone's guess, and the possibility of intriguing gameplay innovations coming from this experimental approach is absolute. This combined with future applications for the Transactor technology may forever change the way multiplayer games are played.



Trespasser

See page 58

What's the game? Featuring a powerful new 3D engine that does not rely on 3D accelerator cards, this first-person adventure strands the player (in the role of Anne) on the dino-infested island several years after the *Lost World* film. Like Gilligan, your job is to survive long enough to get off the island.

What's the big deal? Physics genius and DreamWorks Producer Seamus Blackley has

recruited team members from beyond the normal industry gene pool to help him build a breakthrough game engine. The team includes a coder who wrote the software for the F-22 fighter and an artist who designed Tomorrowland at Tokyo Disneyland. The game features superb physics, including an amazing true water physics model. By far DreamWorks' biggest project to date, the game boasts music produced by John Williams exclusively for the game, voice-

overs by Richard Attenborough, and an as-yet-to-be-named famous actress to voice the role of Anne.

Predicted effect: Like *Messiah*, *Trespasser* will break new ground in software technology and will undoubtedly advance the state of first-person gameplay beyond the limited spectrum of "shooter." This and *Blade Runner* should prove that a licensed title can actually be done well.

Format:	PC
Publisher:	DreamWorks Interactive
Developer:	DreamWorks Interactive
Release Date:	Q1 1998



ng special

Ultima Online

See NG 34

What's the game? *Ultima Online* is the online version of the immensely popular *Ultima* series. While the game doesn't fit neatly into any one genre, it can best be described as a graphical MUD/Internet-based RPG.

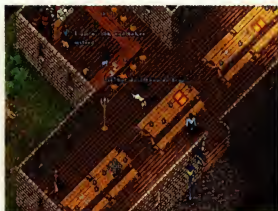
What's the big deal? Origin's servers are designed to handle thousands of players at a time (more than 100,000 of whom are already playing the beta version), as well as the

behavior of thousands of NPCs, monsters, and ecosystems. In keeping with the series' tradition, the game's balance is carefully maintained and enhanced in its online form; for example, if players kill too many sheep, the local dragon will lose its food source and attack the nearby city. A dynamic environment such as this ensures something new and fresh to do every time the game is played.

Predicted effect: If there is only one successful

Format:	Online
Publisher:	Electronic Arts
Developer:	Origin
Release Date:	TBA

commercial persistent game world, it will be this one. Origin has the experience, the talent, and the heritage to pull it off. Also, by sticking with 2D, *UO* avoids having to solve the inevitable problems that will crop up in 3D development. Given the trouble of altering persistent worlds, it may be hard for competitors to play catch-up if *Ultima Online* takes off; this may leave room for new players to emerge sometime in the future if current non-*Ultima* offerings fail to satisfy.



Zelda 64

See NG 34

What's the game? After *Mario*, the 64-bit update of *Zelda 64* has easily been the most highly anticipated among Nintendo fans, and the game looks to be on track for giving loyal fans exactly what they've been hoping for. Staying true to the gameplay model established in earlier *Zelda* adventures, Shigeru Miyamoto combines adventure elements with a light RPG touch.

What's the big deal? The most obvious advancement for *Zelda 64* is the move from

2D to realtime 3D characters and environments. And though this advancement has been played out with several other series over the past couple of years, few have benefited the way *Zelda* has. Beyond the fact that the exploration aspects of the game have taken on a whole new life in 3D, the game has also been allowed a chance to develop a new sense of sophistication and maturity. Although the game is still cartoony, there has been a coming-of-age process achieved through the use of facial

expressions (a feature impossible in earlier versions) and older, more complex-looking characters. It isn't *Final Fantasy VII*, but it isn't *Kirby*-level either.

Predicted effect: While it will surely be a new high watermark for N64, once Nintendo shows how it's done, expect all companies not working on a *Final Fantasy VII* clone (and some that are) to release, on CD or cart, their version of Miyamoto's 3D action/RPG. Who knows? Some may be good.

Format:	Nintendo 64
Publisher:	Nintendo
Developer:	Nintendo
Release Date:	April 1998 (U.S.)



Zork Grand Inquisitor

See NG 32

What's the game? After the disappointing *Zork Nemesis*, series loyalists may soon have reason to rejoice again. *Zork Grand Inquisitor* is a planned return to the things that made the *Zork* series what it is, including the ability to try to do anything in the game, thanks to the addition of the Dungeon Master as a narrator/character, who gives replies to any attempted action.

What's the big deal? Perhaps one of the most

exciting aspects of the *Zork Grand Inquisitor* game package is the inclusion of a new *Zork* text adventure from Marc Blank, one of the co-creators of the series. The game, titled *Undiscovered Underground*, takes place just before the time of *Grand Inquisitor* and leads into its graphic partner well. As for *Grand Inquisitor*, it utilizes the *Nemesis* engine but features several enhancements. Contrary to the way most modern adventures are created, *Grand Inquisitor* was written in full as a text

Format:	PC
Publisher:	Activision
Developer:	Activision
Release Date:	TBA

adventure before any of the graphic work was begun. The end effect of this approach is a graphic adventure that plays more like its deeper, text-based cousin.

Predicted effect: The text adventure — or more importantly, the depth and puzzle quality made possible by the text adventure — is coming back. *Myst* and *7th Guest* aside, the more a graphic adventure is like a text adventure in terms of depth and plot, the better it will do.



Conspicuously missing

Tomb Raider 2

While Core's follow-up to last year's staggeringly good *Tomb Raider* is on track to surpass the original, the game is ultimately just a sequel and therefore will probably not make the same kind of influential impact this time around. More of the same may be a good thing with *Tomb Raider*, but it isn't innovative and thus, hard to consider a breakthrough.

Resident Evil 2

Falling into a similar category as *Tomb Raider 2*, Capcom's sequel will no doubt shock and delight a whole new generation of PlayStation and PC gamers. However, beyond a slightly more sophisticated development touch, there seems to be very little to suggest any real innovations over the original.

Unreal

Though GT Interactive's first-person shooter is easily one of the most visually stunning games ever made, there just doesn't seem to be enough by way of gameplay innovation to make the cut — especially in a genre already in serious danger of overpopulation.

Daikatana

Simply put, the jury is still out on John Romero's new first-person shooter. Certainly the game concept boasts some creative ideas, but a precious few of them have actually been seen running in the game. This could well be one of those titles that should have made the cut, but it's just too early to say for sure. Hopefully, we'll all be pleasantly surprised.

Riven

Myst is still the best-selling PC game some

The following games are the titles that could have made the list except for ...

months. But while we applaud the Miller brothers' previous "explorainment" CDs, *Cosmic Osmo* and *The Manhole*, *Myst*, with its illogical puzzles and lack of inventory, did more to set back the adventure game than anything since Activision closed down Infocom (Activision has improved a lot since then, see above). *Riven* may be beautiful, it may out-*Myst* *Myst*, but unless there's some kind of actual game in there (and nothing we've seen so far implies that there will be), we won't be holding our breath.

Note to developers: By all that's holy, please, please, no *Riven* clones, OK?

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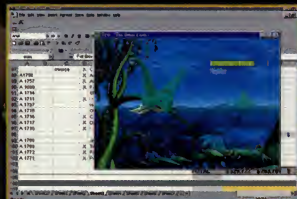
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Non-schtick previews

Despite DreamWorks' less than auspicious start, *Trespasser*, an original game based on the *Lost World* universe, might change your opinion of the company. Also, *Panzer Dragoon Saga* proves that a system's best games are often released towards its twilight.

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DreamWorks dinosaurs with gameplay

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New games from the *PaRappa* camp

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 See the **Next Generation Disc** for more information when you see this symbol



ng alphas



Trespasser

Hoping to eradicate the negativity associated with the ultimate "Hollywood" game developer, DreamWorks has assembled a "dream team" of artists and programmers for its premier first-person adventure



With incredible bump-mapped skins, the dinosaurs in *Trespasser* are unlike any polygonal creatures seen in a game to date



Pity Steven Spielberg. While his movies may rival Lucas' at the box office, DreamWorks is no LucasArts. Despite spending what can only be called stunning amounts of money, DreamWorks Interactive has yet to achieve

***Trespasser* features some of the best talent a big budget can buy**

much more than a steady kicking by press and gamers alike for titles like *The Neverhood* and *Lost World*. So when the company cautiously opened its bruised doors to **Next Generation** to unveil its largest and most ambitious endeavor yet — *Trespasser* — we were prepared to be underwhelmed. What we saw, though, should make Lucas nervous.

Format:	PC
Publisher:	DreamWorks
Developer:	DreamWorks
Release Date:	Q1 1998
Origin:	U.S.

Set several years after *The Lost World*, this "interactive sequel" puts players in the role of Anne, a shipwreck survivor stranded on the dinosaur-infested island from the film. From a first-person perspective, in real time, players guide Anne through the island's many hazards, using the wreckage of the movie's Site B to secure her rescue.



The game environment blends the wilderness with Site B wreckage

The game is such a priority at DreamWorks that Producer Seamus Blackley gets the occasional call from Spielberg himself.

Blackley, producer of *System Shock* and *Flight Unlimited* at Looking Glass, sums up the project like this: "At Looking Glass, we were always striving for good gameplay. So I figured the thing to do here was to take an engine that had really good gameplay, and then [use the budget] to add things onto it, like the music, and really take it to another level."

And take it to another level he has. *Trespasser* features some of the best talent a big budget can buy. The music includes tracks scored by John Williams exclusively for the game. Richard Attenborough voices the memoirs of ingen founder John Hammond, which are revealed by Anne (set to be played by a "name" actress, to be announced later) as she explores the island.

A lazy producer might ride on these trappings, but Blackley is still more committed to the gameplay experience than to the flash. "People enjoyed [*System Shock*]," he says, "because they

understood the physical modeling. Their success in the game was based on their ability to use their intuition to get through the game — to use their intuition from the real world to solve the problems in the game, and not to be second-guessing the designers." Still, he admits improvements in gameplay from the Looking Glass days are needed. Why? Because with those games, "we fucked up really bad and made [the games] way too complicated."

Blackley is considered by some in the industry to be the ultimate game developer, and it is easy to see why. He holds a Ph.D. in theoretical high energy physics, and his uncanny mathspk is at the same time blended with colorful vocabulary, belying a deviant schoolboy mentality. Blackley is certainly a grown-up, but one who hasn't shaken that youthful destructive nature



ng alphas



With strong AI, the dinosaurs behave as if in the wild. Players may often venture across different species in conflict

that is inherent in so many gamers — you get the sense he still comes up with new and highly inventive ways to blow up the toilets in public rest rooms. If he can transfer that energy to the all-star team he's assembled, he may very well produce DreamWorks' first hit game.

Given Blackley's academic background, the engine's high-end physics model isn't surprising. The engine is based on immersion properties, and everything within the game is persistent. Game objects are built and held together with a "magnet" system. When an object breaks, it stays broken. The player can pick up and use broken pieces of an object, and corpses don't magically disappear. Even the innovative inventory



While small firearms are available to the player, ammo is in short supply. A pistol may kill a raptor, but it certainly won't kill a T-Rex

system uses the physics magnets, "so you can shove stuff into your belt," Blackley says excitedly. "You can carry a couple of things — and that's your inventory system. If you want to look at what you're holding, you look down and see what you've got shoved into your belt. There's no breaking of context." His goal is to provide gameplay liberties unlike those seen in any game before. "If you want to pick up the chair leg and use it as a weapon," Blackley charms, "that's cool. If you want to pick up a shotgun and beat something with it instead of shooting with it, you're welcome to do that."

The game features one of the most impressive terrain engines we've seen; by rendering terrain to an offscreen cache and then only redrawing objects when the user moves significantly (maybe 100 yards for distant objects), the engine doesn't have to render every object every frame. This enables the team to create an environment with tens of thousands of trees in real time. Still, Blackley assures that "we're not building Microsoft Hiking Simulator." Even the water in *Trespasser* boasts strong physics. Akin to the water in the N64 version of *Wave Race*, it is physically modeled and physically rendered. "So if you throw something into the water," says Programmer Scott Peter, "it creates waves, and the waves propagate according to actual, correct physics. It is rendered through a correct optical model, with a per-pixel reflection equation that utilizes our bump-mapping primitive images."

The game is also set to solve some of



Several sketches depict Anne. At press time, the designers hadn't decided if the player will ever see her face during gameplay



the problems plaguing 3D graphics, starting with the proper shadowing so that the placement of objects and distances look natural. "This is so you don't get into the Lara Croft problem of having no lighting and not knowing where to jump," Blackley expounds. The team also has to draw on the broader *Lost World* license, and things have to look good enough to impress Spielberg. "You realize that the dinosaurs are the star of the show," Blackley says. "You have to be able to put a skin on them that looks amazing."

And what a skin the team has put on the dinosaurs. Within the software, the

programming team has implemented a revolutionary bump-mapped skin, which adds depth to the textures and produces a startlingly realistic look. This is complemented by Phong shading, which enables artists to light every pixel on the dinosaur's skin, as opposed to Gouraud shading, which only lets programmers light the corners of polygons.

"They can't look like polygonal creatures," Blackley says of the dinosaurs. "They can't even look like *Quake 2* creatures." To this end, Blackley hired fine artists from outside the game world, including Art Director Terry Izumi, a designer at Disney for several years who designed some of Tokyo Disney's Tomorrowland, and George Edwards, a veteran Disney animator who animated the character Sleeping Beauty for the film of the same name.

To process the high level of physics and artwork in *Trespasser*, the team is not compromising on specs — it will require a P120, at the minimum. In its attempt to set a new high bar for rendering on-the-fly, DreamWorks recruited some heavy hitters from in and outside the game industry, including the man responsible for coding the software for Lockheed's F-22 fighter, Greg Stull. And Mark Langerak, who created *Trespasser's* terrain modeler and cutting-edge compression, was the head

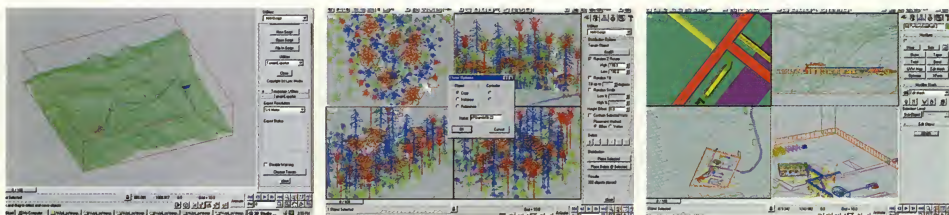


The dinosaur models are industry standard at 300 polygons, but it's the bump-mapping and Phong shading that really make them shine



The different dinosaurs (between five and 10) will vary from peaceful herbivore to savage carnivore types





The artists create both interior and exterior environments in 3D Studio MAX, then import them directly into the game

of development at Sega Europe.

But why worry about software rendering when universal acceptance of 3D accelerators is imminent? "More hardware accelerators are shipping on more and more PCs," Blackley pouts, "and more and more games are looking exactly the same as everything else." The producer denounces the "super filtered" look of these games, which he says makes them appear "all blurry and weird."

Of course, Blackley quickly adds that those who've invested in 3D cards will get an added visual boost. "We're basically going to use it as a pixel pump and to move data. It's going to enable us to do even more math."

And as Shiny's David Perry suggested in **NG 33**, smart math is also Blackley's key to procuring landmark performances from limited hardware. But it hasn't all been algebra problems. To get his project rolling properly, Blackley acknowledges that he's had to cut through his fair share of idealistic Hollywood sandbaggers at

DreamWorks. "I was opposed to starting [the way] Rocket Science did," he says with the air of a protagonist. "Trying to get Hollywood talent to design games is bizarre and obviously never going to work." Now that the company has decided to do things his way, he's got plenty of weight riding on his shoulders.

"The thing I'm sweating about is making sure the game is fun," Blackley exhumes, exhausted from a day of running **Next Generation** from room to room to see pieces of a demo that shattered when a server crashed the night before. "When I'm sitting around writing equations for dinosaurs," he says, "I'm always thinking about how cool it is to pick shit up and hit a dinosaur with it; what it feels like to hit a dinosaur."

As long as DreamWorks allows Blackley and his team of 30 to maintain this vision, it may have a chance at something that, as yet, no one at the company has delivered — a truly impressive game.

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DreamWorks is capable of getting several complex polygonal characters on screen at the same time. And as in the film, the veloceraptors travel in small groups



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Sony Music Entertainment

One of Sony's more creative teams is hard at work on a plethora of new titles



Speed Power Gunbike features shape-changing robots and a fully 3D environment. Flashy special effects underscore the game's heavily anime-influenced design



Sony Music Entertainment cut its development teeth with the pretty (if not exactly exciting) *Kileak* series during PlayStation's salad days. Earlier this year, however, it was also responsible for the astonishingly gorgeous graphic adventure, *Kowloon's Gate*, and a little thing called *PaRappa the Rapper*.

With this success under its collective belt, Sony Music Entertainment now has five titles in the works that show off a nice breadth

of gameplay and subject matter, as well as the graphic splendor the division has become known for. *Tenchu*, an action game with some adventure elements, seems to be a deliberate cross between Square's *Bushido Blade* and Konami's *Metal Gear Solid*. Set in feudal Japan, the game allows players to choose between two characters, either a male or female ninja. The object is to infiltrate a sprawling castle, which is constructed as a fully 3D, texture-

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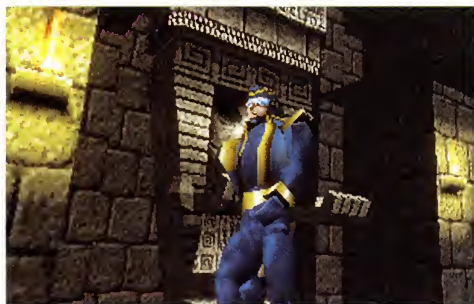


Judging by the gratuitous arterial spray above, the team at SME probably saw a few *Baby Cart* movies and played *Bushido Blade*

mapped environment that players can explore at will. The influence of *Bushido Blade* is clear, as players can run anywhere, even over balconies and roofs. As in *Metal Gear Solid*, however, players will have to rely on stealth to avoid detection — even a shadow can give the player away — waiting until the right moment to spring to attack.

Another 3D action game from SME, in a slightly different vein, is *Escaper*, based on an original superhero-style universe. It's clear some thought and creativity have gone into the character designs, although the backgrounds are not as detailed as

the ones in *Tenchu*. Again, players will be offered a choice between two characters, Escaper and Danger, but will also have the opportunity to create and modify their own characters. The emphasis seems to be more on straightforward action, but there are some puzzle elements scattered throughout. How this will mesh with the game's continuous countdown clock, which requires the player to keep moving, remains to be seen.



Escaper is a 3D action game with superhero characters. These early backgrounds are relatively simple, but serviceable

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Still in 3D, but a very different sort of game altogether is *Speed Power Gunbike*, another of the giant mech games Japanese players can't seem to get enough of. In the year 2097, the Ariadone, a resistance movement battling an evil warlord, has developed a new kind of weapon: a transforming battle robot called the Gunbike. The player can initially choose from three different classes, each with a different mix of weapons and armor, and each can transform between a robot shape, a hovercraft, and an armored motorcycle. A lot of work seems to have gone into creating special effects for the Gunbike's weapons, which only add to the game's consciously anime-style production design.

Ragnacoeur is SME's attempt to put a new wrinkle on the Japanese console RPG, again presented in 3D. The map changes at least three times, and the battles are also in 3D. While the game seems well-constructed, the main point of interest is the game's MCBS, or Memory Card Battle System. After completing the game alone, players can then transfer their character to a PlayStation memory card and pit it against another player in a special Versus mode, using all the experience and items collected during the single-player game. To be more than a gimmick, this will require a large variety of choice in how players can develop their characters. Whether this is in fact the case, at this early date is still unclear.



Ragnacoeur is SME's first attempt at the traditional Japanese console RPG, to which a Versus mode has been added



Tenchu's Japanese castle setting is completely open to the player, who can roam, hide, and fight just about anywhere

The last title currently under development at SME is *Dam Dam Stompland*, one of those odd, refreshingly genre-defying novelty games that emerge from Japan every now and again. Based on one of the most childish of children's games, the object is simple: Step on other players' shadows. The game appears to be colorful and fast, however, and could well be worth a look upon release.

Sony Music Entertainment appears to be one of the more creative and interesting names in PlayStation development lately, based on its most recent releases and what is known about forthcoming ones. If the level of quality can be maintained, and the gameplay can be made to match the visuals, this will be something to shout about indeed.



Yup. It's *Dam Dam Stompland*. Coming from the makers of *PaRappa*, however, it somehow doesn't seem so strange

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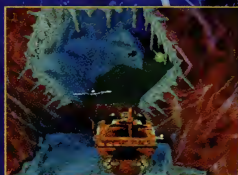
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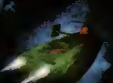
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LA GRIFFE

Check out the game demo and interview with the
creators of Critical Depth on this month's demo disc.




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Atari comes alive

Can one of videogaming's most tattered names reclaim its place among the greatest game makers of the world?

Despite the demise of Atari Corp. — the company responsible for the Jaguar, among other crimes — Atari Games, the coin-op game division (which was retained by Warner when the console/computer divisions of the company was sold off to Jack Tramiel), is not dead. In fact, with the recent success of titles like *Mace* and the beloved *San Francisco Rush*, Atari Games (now a wholly owned subsidiary of Midway Games) is coming off its best fiscal performance in years. So how is it that a company that seemed to have so little idea how to succeed just a little over a year ago is now getting it so right? The answer begins with the drop of a quarter and a company getting back to its roots.

For all the talk of arcades being a brutal place to do business, there has always been a handful of success stories,

No other company has known more ups and downs than Atari

and Atari Games may be rejoining Midway, Sega, and Namco as one of those fortunate few again.

Perhaps no other company in the game industry has known more ups and downs than Atari, and the latest chapter of good fortune is just another example of how a shift in focus and a devotion to quality can dramatically change the outlook of a company in a very short time. Things first started looking up again for Atari Games with the release of *Area 51* for arcades (some credit must also be given to *Primal Rage*, but most of the company's fortune from its prehistoric brawler came from merchandising). Although the low-grade video and track-based action of *Area 51* didn't impress critics, the game scored big financially.

But *Area 51* and *Primal Rage* were only small signs of things to come for Atari Games. The big change in the



It was on the back of *San Francisco Rush* that Atari Games finally and definitively found its way back into the hearts of gamers

company's fortunes came with the sale to Williams/Midway. Midway, unlike Time Warner, knows how to make popular arcade games, and more importantly, knows how to leave developers alone to make the best games they can.

The parent company was rewarded with *Maximum Force* (a follow-up to *Area 51*), *Mace*, and *San Francisco Rush*. Although the first two games sold fine, *SF Rush* has been the major hit for Atari. Based on 3Dfx's Voodoo technology, both *SF Rush* and *Mace* were cheaper to develop than a purely proprietary system (a cost savings passed on to buyers), and both looked great. Atari Games is keen on continuing to utilize 3Dfx technology in its arcade games but insists on customizing the technology to its liking via its own hardware R & D efforts.

And so, once again, Atari is back. Can the company that created the video arcade game continue to thrive in an industry that is as demanding of its winners as it is cruel to its losers? This month **Next Generation** talks to Atari Games President Dan Van Elderen and other key staff, and takes a look at two new games designed to maintain Atari's current positive momentum, *San Francisco Rush: The Rock*, *Alcatraz Edition* and *The "Juko" Project*.



Atari Games is betting it knows what the player wants



The stunning *Mace* is another example of Atari Games' recent success

San Francisco Rush:

The Rock, Alcatraz Edition



Still running on an enhanced 3Dfx Voodoo board, *The Rock, Alcatraz Edition* offers all of the stunning visuals found in the original

It's always a dangerous proposition to tamper with perfection, but the *Rush* team just may have found a way to do it with this promising update



Before the release of *San Francisco Rush*, the gut-wrenching joyride through the hilly streets of "the City by the Bay," the Atari brand name carried about as much respect with new-school gamers as, say, Wrangler jeans do with socially aware middle schoolers. That changed as soon as coin-op players got a taste for driving serious muscle cars *Bullit*-style through some of the city's most famous locales. Not since Sega's *Daytona U.S.A.*, in fact, have gamers been invited to feel so good about American-style racing, and arcade players have shown their appreciation with quarter drop after quarter drop.

So if the game is doing so well, why does it need a face-lift? *San Francisco Rush: The Rock, Alcatraz Edition* was begun as just that — a slight upgrade for arcade owners to get a little more life from their initial investment without a major financial commitment — but the project soon became bigger than that. And so *The Rock* is now close to what many companies would call a fully realized sequel. And yet, arcade owners still won't need to buy a new unit to offer the new version to players. In fact, *The Rock* is just a ROM update for the original, and runs on the same 3Dfx-based hardware, an architecture that Senior 3D Animator

Format:	Arcade
Publisher:	Atari Games
Developer:	Atari Games
Release Date:	November 1997
Origin:	U.S.

Spencer Lindsay describes as "great for the artists." Says Lindsay, "A huge vista of texture-mapped polygons just opened up before us."

The new feature list for *San Francisco Rush: The Rock, Alcatraz*



Among the new cars offered, the yellow cab is one of the most surprising by way of performance



Alcatraz Edition features new tracks and additional shortcuts

Edition includes: five new tracks (four of which are enhanced versions of tracks developed for the N64 home version of the game), four new cars, and several new shortcuts added to the original tracks. The fifth new track, developed specifically for the upgrade, is set on the island of Alcatraz and offers all the excitement of the additional appeal of fantastic stunt-driving elements. Imagine an expanded version of the half pipe "shortcut" on track 2 of the original. The new cars give the game an even wider appeal with more of a streetcar emphasis (check out the yellow cab), and the new shortcuts give even the original tracks a whole new sense of excitement, especially when players are trying to get

an edge in multiplayer races. Ultimately, the new edition delivers all the fun of the original (literally) while giving experienced players entirely new challenges to face.

And so does this mean that there will not be a *San Francisco Rush 2*? No, in fact the wheels are already in motion to create an arcade sequel (not to be confused with the forthcoming *California Speed*, also from Atari Games), from scratch — possibly with 3Dfx's next generation of processor driving the 3D. Concludes Senior Staff Producer John Ray: "I am very excited about continuing. *Rush* was such a strong property, I think we have to continue capitalizing on it. People love it and we love working on it."



The new tracks feature all the heart-stopping action of the originals

The "Juko" Project

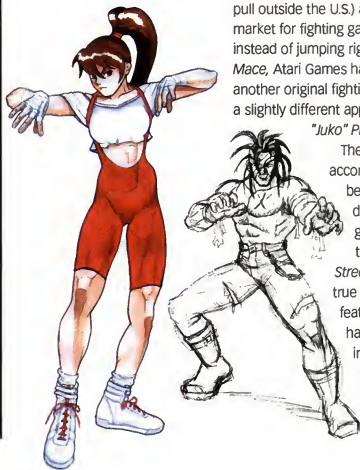
Now that the racing market is sures-up with *San Francisco Rush*, Atari Games is turning its attention to the fighting genre

Though critically acclaimed and a small-scale financial success, Atari Games' last arcade brawler *Mace* suffered from a limited appeal due to, among other things, its medieval art style (a look without much pull outside the U.S.) and a deflated market for fighting games in general. So instead of jumping right into a sequel for *Mace*, Atari Games has set out to create another original fighting game series with a slightly different approach, called *The "Juko" Project*.

The primary objective, according to the team behind the development of the game, is to capture the speed of the *Street Fighter* series in a true 3D fighting engine (a feat the developers feel has yet to be realized in any of the 3D fighters). The game features an anime-style cast of

characters from around the world. "No matter where you are in the world," suggests Game Director James Goddard, "your hero is there." The game should also offer a very *Street Fighter* style of play set in a true 3D environment with a heavy emphasis on play in the Z-axis. Says Sr. Vice President & Executive Producer Mark Pierce: "I think part of the boredom that's out there right now is because you're on revs three and four of all these games. Hopefully with this hybrid [2D speed, 3D gameplay], we can create something that stands out." He later adds, "We have the basic structure to offer the standard forms of entertainment, such as a driving game and a gun game, but we're trying with *Juko* to fill out the portfolio and establish our fighting game family. We came close with *Primal Rage*, but people don't really want to be dinosaurs."

Look for more detailed coverage of *The "Juko" Project* in upcoming issues of **Next Generation**.





An interview with

Dan Van Elderen

A brief moment in time called Atari, with President and COO Dan Van Elderen.

NG: You've been at Atari since the beginning, right?

DV: I began at Atari Games right at the very beginning, in 1973, working with Nolan Bushnell. Actually, at the time I was working on the line, troubleshooting black-and-white palm games. So I've been through the entire rise and fall of Atari several times. My background is on the technical side — hardware engineering in particular. Back when I began, it was before the advent of the microprocessor. For the first couple of years our products were all TTL. Discreet Logic based products. We didn't have the benefit of programmers or animators, and it was typically an engineer designing the games.

I actually began when we were in the process of building *Pong*, but I wasn't involved in the original creation of the game. The first product I was actively involved in, from a design standpoint, was *Tank*, which we did in 1974. I think it was the first videogame that introduced the concept of shooting projectiles. Probably my next major involvement with a project was on the original *Indy 800* project — an eight-player racing game where you had a 25-inch horizontally mounted monitor and two steering wheels on each side of a four-sided (cocktail) cabinet. That really was the first product to introduce the concept of multiplayer (i.e., more than just one or two).

The next noteworthy product that I was involved in was the design of *Sprint II*. This was the first game that actually introduced the concept of a computer car that had the intelligence to drive itself around the track — not necessarily just in a canned predetermined course, but in a semi-intelligent manner, depending on how you were doing.

Then beginning in approximately 1980, I assumed responsibility for heading up the overall product development at Atari Games and basically headed up product development here through what were really our glory years in the '80s, when we did everything from *Asteroids* to *Missile Command*, *Tetris*, *Battlezone*, *Gauntlet*, *Hard Driving*, and *Race Driving*.

Then in 1989 I was asked to move over and head up our newly formed consumer division (Tengen). I headed up Tengen from 1989 through 1995, at which point we began producing

products for the original NES system. We were one of the first ones to jump on board with Sega when it introduced its Genesis. And in 1995 the decision was made to recombine the two divisions. Basically we all got back under one common umbrella and I was asked to head up the whole thing.

NG: How would you define the company today?



I actually began when we were in the process of building *Pong*

DV: In terms of defining what Atari is, I think at its roots it's always been primarily a coin-op based company. That is the platform or the medium on which we've always created our most significant content. And that's really to a large degree why fairly recently we've gone back to our roots. It's tough to survive, much less make money in the coin-op business. You have very lengthy development cycles, very costly development, very high risk of failure, and even when you are successful, relatively modest returns on that investment. But because it is the ideal medium to create content, once you have created on that platform, you're able to really capitalize on it.

So that's the model — our roots go back to coin-op, most of our significant accomplishments were implemented in the coin-op medium, and that's the model that we're following today. We've probably got 75 to 80% of our resources focused exclusively on coin-op.

NG: Could a successful run in coin-op eventually lead us to a day where Atari releases another consumer hardware unit?

DV: Anything is certainly possible. But I would see that as being unlikely. I think we've recognized that our strength is in creating content. Now, in

order to create content in the arcade business, you have to be able to continually push technology to do that next unique, novel, or technologically interesting thing. But I don't see us getting, per se, back into the hardware manufacturing business in terms of manufacturing our own console or platform. This is not to say that something so unique or different couldn't come up in the way of technology, but I think it's pretty unlikely given our current emphasis.

NG: You've recently found success in 3Dfx-based hardware. Will you continue on this route?

DV: I'd say the majority of what we're currently working on is 3Dfx-related architecture. Not necessarily just the current generation of its chipset, but we're also potentially looking at stuff that we anticipate coming down the road. I would say as a company right now, if you looked at what was in development, probably two-thirds is related directly to that. There are other

technologies that we are looking at and continue to experiment with, but right now, I think 3Dfx is still delivering for us the best price performance.

There is some tremendous chip development that has already gone on. That's something that we'd like to continue to take advantage of in terms of figuring out ways of integrating that technology into our systems. That's something, for us, that's really not new or unique to 3Dfx — we began doing this several years ago. In fact one of our more successful product lines, originally *Area 51* and more recently *Maximum Force*, are based upon the original Jaguar chipset. Because of that, we delivered some very cost-effective but still fairly powerful hardware performance.

NG: Do you see this borrowing of PC technologies as the future of coin-op?

DV: I would expect that certainly there is going to be a significant tendency to try to take advantage of this. I think where I may differ from some is that at the end of the day, it's the content that drives the success of the product and not so much the particular technology it's based on. The technology, in terms of performance and cost effectiveness, can make a difference as to how good something looks or how quick it reacts or how cost effective it is, but at the end of the day, it still comes down to the quality of the content. It's the game, it's the game, it's the game.



This is probably a dangerous statement to make, but I'm one of those who believe that we will not see any major new creators of coin-op content beyond the existing base that exists today. I say this for a combination of reasons. Certainly a very significant reason is due to the fact that barriers to entry and succeeding in the arcade business are extremely high, in terms of technology, but more importantly in terms of creating arcade games that can succeed. The typical development can run anywhere from one and a half to three years and can cost anywhere from \$2-5 million, and if you're lucky, you can get a 50% success rate on

something that can be in and out of production within 60 to 90 days and then you're on to the next project.

I think a lot of it comes down to having the experience to understand the mentality of what the arcade player wants. It's quite different in many ways from what you need to do on a platform or PC-based product. In a typical arcade product you have to sell the essence of that game in 90 seconds. You've got to sell it in such a way that the player wants to do it again and again and again. If you do a one-time sale with him and that's it, you've lost, whereas you can get by with that in a consumer or PC market with clever marketing or a big name license attached to it. [In arcades] you have to sell to the exact same player over and over again, just based on the thrill you give him in 90 or 120 seconds. It's difficult to architect and design games that can successfully do that. At the end of the day, that's going to be more of a factor than who's using what chipset.

NG: Does your need to sell the same player over and over again limit the genres that you can explore?

DV: We have concerns because there is such a limited number of genres that have been successful over recent years. You've got driving games, fighting games, and shooting games, and they are probably, in that order, the three most significant categories. The fourth category, which is a sports category, is a significant notch below the other three. Then you've got a very minor category, which is sort of a quiz, puzzle category. But the vast majority of the business today in the arcade are in those three genres. That is of concern to us because when you're that limited in the variety of categories you offer, you always run the danger of boring the player. I think that is finally starting to happen in fighting games. We're almost seeing a yawn every time a new, great fighting game is introduced from both the distribution network, as well as the player base. That having been said, it's still your safest, most

conservative development bet to develop a product in one of those three main genres.

We probably focus about half of our development into those three categories and traditional products that one might expect to see coming. We put the other half of our development into other new, undefined genres or categories, in terms of trying to find that something that is unique or different. Though we might put equal resources into each of those, at the end of the

Until 18 months ago, our international business ... was almost nonexistent

day, you might see two or three of the more standard genre games coming out versus one of the other because your risk of failure is so much higher with untested genres.

NG: How much success have you had in the international market?

DV: Historically we have done reasonably well in Europe, on probably a comparable basis to what we do in the U.S., but in most other international markets, historically Atari has always done very poorly. Up until probably 18 months ago, our international business outside of Europe was almost nonexistent. We have, however, had some fairly significant success in the last 12 to 18 months in developing international markets, in particular the Asian market.

NG: What do you see as the future of arcades, and what are you doing to be a part of it?

DV: I think we inherently believe that there will always be an arcade. I think it's something that

We inherently believe that there will always be an arcade

will exist because of the social environment. I think it's also something that has succeeded at its best when it was able to deliver an experience that couldn't be nearly as satisfactorily duplicated in the home environment. I think the challenge to us, and certainly where we're focusing our energies, is to continue to deliver things that provide an experience in the arcade that is unique and different.

Now, on the opposite side of that double-edged sword, is that the second we're done creating that particularly successful product in the arcade medium, we're challenged to say, "OK now we'll take that to the home and make it equally successful there so we can actually capitalize on the content we've created and make some money on it."

NG: Would you say that the home systems that are in place right now are closer than ever to

being able to deliver what we're currently seeing in the arcade?

DV: I'd say they are as close as ever. But frankly, it's a cycle that I've seen before. This is part of the reason we believe we need to keep pushing the technology to where you're always going to that next level. Yes, it is as close as it has ever been, but I think that arcades will move on again and the cycle will continue.

NG: Could you explain how Atari achieved its current relationship with Midway?

DV: Atari Games is now a wholly owned subsidiary of Midway Games. Atari was initially formed back in 1972

and founded by Nolan Bushnell along with some other initial investors. He sold out to what was then Warner Communications in the 1975 time frame. Warner, which eventually became Time Warner, owned either all or the controlling majority of the company up until 1984. In 1984 it sold off the biggest part of the company, which was the home computer and consumer division, to Jack Tramiel, and that's when we became Atari Corp. In 1985 they formed what is today known as Atari Games Corp. Initially Namco had an investment in the company and was actually a part owner of it. But that ownership was subsequently bought out in about '89-'90 and so from that point on, we were a wholly owned subsidiary of Time Warner.

Time Warner decided in 1995 that it wanted to exit from the videogame business. And so it approached myself and the other management staff here and said go find a new partner or

somebody to buy you, which was an approach, though it might have been a little bit shocking, that I appreciated. At least they didn't just come to us one day and say, "Here's your new boss." It was more like, "Go find a new boss." And frankly, one of the very first companies we approached in that respect was Williams, WMS Industries. We immediately hit it off, both because we'd known each other for so long as respected competitors, but also because it was one of the few companies that we came into contact with who were our kind of people and who understood the arcade business and the difficulty of trying to succeed in it.

So in March of '96, Atari Games was acquired completely by WMS Industries. Later on that summer WMS restructured and basically took all of its videogame assets and put them into one company, and that's what was launched through an IPO as Midway Games Inc. So Midway Games Inc. basically represents all of the videogame businesses or divisions of what had been

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Metropolis



Witcher is based on the novels of Polish author Andrzej Sapkowski — a different flavor of novel than ones published in the West

Although most U.S. gamers probably don't think of Poland as a seething hotbed of cutting-edge games, it just goes to show you can never tell where the next big thing is going to happen. Based in Lubin, Poland, Metropolis Software House was founded in 1992 by Adrian Chmielarz. "Luckily," Chmielarz says, "I can't find any one thing that sets us apart being a developer from Poland. You might find this boring, but the Polish market mirrors the world market. If a game is a hit worldwide, then it's also a hit in Poland. I love diversity. I hope people will say Metropolis is a Polish game developer, not a developer representing Polish trends. Look what happened to France. French guys are known for their excellent graphics and shallow gameplay. But such stereotypes work usually against anyone from a given country who makes something different. There's almost no such thing as a 'U.S. kind of developer' or 'U.K. kind of developer.' I hope the same will happen to Poland and that we will be able to create games that will be recognizable by their quality, not the place of development."

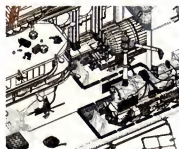
In some cases, though, a country's culture can add to a game. "Sometimes adding a bit of national stuff is very good," Chmielarz says. "Just look at

Ever heard of a game from Poland? Neither had we. Good thing we checked

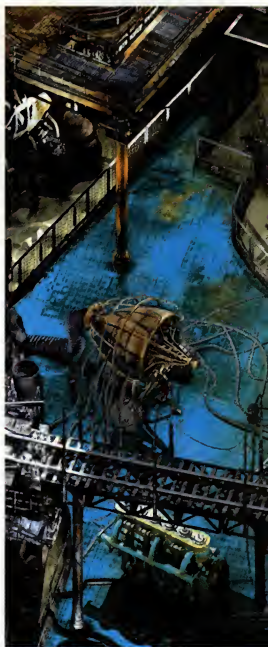


Japanese RPGs. Their religion, beliefs, and imagination produce really outstanding things. Our history — 50 years of fighting against communism, Slavic mythology — it all settles in our minds and will surely affect our games."

Metropolis released its first game, *Mystery of the Statue*, in 1993. "I practically made it myself," Chmielarz jokes. "I took various cool pictures in Saint Tropez and of one of those old Polish churches — where we found real skeletons from the 17th century — then I made a game out of them. I coded, I made some special effects, retouched all the pictures. It was the first Polish PC adventure, and it sold extremely well." *Teenagent* followed in 1995. Distributed as shareware, it won a Silver Award from U.K. magazine *PC Format*. *Katharsis*, a 3D



Comparing the NURBS model (top) to the finished render (bottom) shows the developer's attention to detail



shooter, was released earlier this year, and an animated graphic adventure, *The Prince and the Coward*, is available now.

Metropolis has grown to 20 full-time programmers, artists, and designers, and is almost finished with *Reflux*, a 3D, realtime, action/strategy game. Next up in the works is a pair of adventure/RPGs — *Witcher* and *Haunted City*, which Chmielarz describes as a working title. "[It] has almost nothing to do with the game, it just somehow stuck."

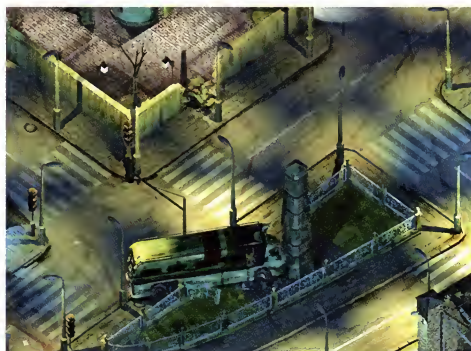
Most of Metropolis' games are what Chmielarz calls "story games." "We believe there are two kind of games," he explains. "Twitch games and stories. Twitch games are like *Quake* or *Heroes of Might and Magic*. The essence is interactivity — the player is able to do with [the game] whatever he or she wishes: configure, change the story, build homemade levels, etc. Story games are the ones when a game designer wants to tell the player a story, to present a fantasy world. Such games are often more linear than twitch games, but not necessarily. Metropolis is more interested in story games than twitch games. We want to tell stories, to make players cry



Metropolis founder Adrian Chmielarz says of *Witcher*: "This is a game for adults. Not just sex and violence, but serious psychological issues"

or laugh, to raise issues impossible to raise in twitch games. A vision of a game designer can be much more involving, provide much more drama than the world in which the plot is an excuse for the engine. Of course, we don't think twitch games are bad, it's just that 75% of our efforts go to story games, and only 25% to twitch games. This is a question of personal choice, not a matter of which kinds of games are better or worse."

Although it's being developed for PC, not a console, *Haunted City* follows squarely (no pun intended) in the fertile



Haunted City uses prerendered backgrounds and realtime characters. Graphically the team is deliberately gunning for FFVII-level quality

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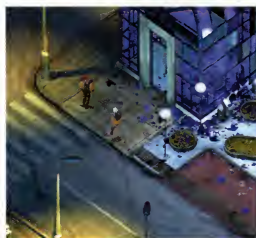


Metropolis' current release is *The Prince and the Coward*, produced in cooperation with the U.K.'s Revolution Software, developer of the graphic adventure *Circle of Blood*

ground sown by *Final Fantasy VII*. A deliberate attempt to create a Japanese-style RPG, although less stylized and more realistic in design, the game uses prerendered backgrounds and 3D characters to tell the story of a NATO operative sent into the mutant-infested city of Gorky 17. "Well," Chmielarz says, "to explain it the fastest way, simply think of *FFVII* — the plot and design are very different, but leave the same amount of adventure, then add a bit more strategy in the 3D battles. Usually in RPGs the only strategy is to find the correct weapon for each monster. But we want to add some other elements from other games, like special mixed attacks and the importance of the team's formation, and put some adventure parts into the battles, and so on. However, we're also putting a lot of effort into assuring that the game is easy to get into, has an intuitive and simple interface, and is a lot of fun."

Haunted City is being rendered entirely using Real3D. "[It's] one of the best raytracers out there," Chmielarz insists. "It's a NURBS-based program with a lot of features not seen in Softimage or Alias. None of the backgrounds uses tiles. Every location is a new artwork." Each realtime 3D character is made up of around 1,300 polygons, and the final game will feature MMX enhancements and 3D sound. Metropolis is also working to support 3Dfx-based cards directly. "Currently this is the only 3D card we support in a native mode," Chmielarz explains. "As for the software renderer, previously we came up with our own, but DirectX 5.0 is a real improvement, and although the frame rate is still worse than in our own renderer, we are considering switching to Direct3D. This way we will assure better quality for those with any of the new 3D cards."

Unlike most console-style RPGs, monster encounters are not random — the player can see them coming — and the designers are currently deciding



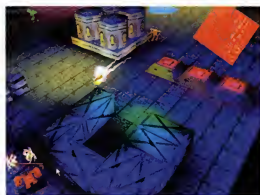
Haunted City is an attempt to bring a console-style RPG to PC

whether combat will be realtime, turn-based, or, as in *FFVII*, a bit of both.

"The city and its inhabitants have a lot of surprises to offer," Chmielarz boasts. "The plot is nonlinear, although the overall story is. To assure some replayability, we will add many subtle touches, secrets, and probably four endings."

Witcher is based on the stories of Polish fantasy author Andrzej Sapkowski. "Sapkowski is absolute number one in Poland," Chmielarz enthuses, "and his series about the witcher Geralt is a megahit. It's very good reading, full of imagination, a great vision of a fantasy world. However, we didn't choose *Witcher* because of his commercial success. We chose him because we think it's ideal material for an adventure game."

Within the game's (and novel's) fantasy world, a "witcher" is a kind of cross between a wizard and an assassin, a profession that requires years of training



Reflux was Metropolis' entry into the realtime strategy genre — although the team insists on calling it "action/strategy" rather than "realtime" strategy

ng alphas



and various potions and drugs to achieve. "Whenever a village or a town is harassed by a monster," Chmielarz explains, "people hire witches. After such training, a witcher is no longer like an average human. He can see in the dark, move faster than a common man, and so on." However, this also makes witchers the objects of some distrust, fear, and even hate, and the player's character Geralt is the most powerful and hated of them all.

Built entirely in 3D and seen from a third-person perspective, *Witcher*, like Sierra's *Mask of Eternity*, combines action with adventure game elements. The combat engine is similar to ones found in weapons-based fighting games, but as in *Bushido Blade*, a single blow can be deadly. "Usually it's very hard to orientate in 3D," Chmielarz explains, "and there are a lot of problems for the player with the correct position and such. But we have found a way to simplify it and to make it transparent to players, so they can focus on the fight itself, not on the controls."

"This is a game for adults. The term 'for adults' does not mean the game is just about sex and violence. I mean there will be some serious, psychological issues. We're not heading in the same direction as the creators of *Carnageddon* or *Postal*. We will give the player some sex and violence, but next to that, we want to raise some moral issues to think about. If you have seen *Blade Runner* or *Bad Lieutenant*, you know what we mean."

The bulk of Metropolis' output looks quite impressive indeed and more impressive still for having come from such a relatively unknown development house with only a few years of experience. Plus, working out of Eastern Europe has its own problems. "Try not to have problems," Chmielarz cracks, "when your taxes are up to 40%, VAT is 22%, and social security is obligatory and takes 52% of the payment. The problems are normal, just like in any other country where people are paid a couple of times less than in a 'normal' economy. For example, we need motion capture equipment. A



Haunted City switches to realtime 3D during combat. Although the background here is a place holder, the characters are complete

very good one was shown at the latest Siggraph, and it kicks ass, but costs \$30,000. For an average development team this is affordable. For us, not. We have to wait until we find a publisher, and I could write a thousand pages about the troubles of finding a publisher — you wouldn't believe me if I told you."

However, Chmielarz and the rest of Metropolis are undaunted. "We will fight until we succeed," he insists. "I hope *Reflux*, *Witcher*, or *Haunted City* are the proof we're pretty good fighters. This is a tough business, but I like it this way. Whenever I tell the team the story of Id Software, or the story of how Richard Garriott started out, or about 21st Century and its pinball game, it only gives them a good kick to work harder and do even more amazing things. My current favorite story is about Romero. A journalist asked him if the success of *Wolfenstein* surprised him. 'No,' he answered, 'from the very beginning we knew we had something special. Something revolutionary.' We have the same feeling here."

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And, of course, players can expect more than a few flashy effects

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Quest 64



T*HQ joins the race to release
Nintendo 64's first RPG



Format:	Nintendo 64
Publisher:	T*HQ
Developer:	Imagineer
Release Date:	Q2 1998
Origin:	Japan

The first RPGs on Nintendo systems have always been classics. *Dragon Warrior*, on the 8-bit NES, spawned five sequels and is widely considered to be the first of the great console RPGs. *Final Fantasy II*, one of Super Nintendo's first great titles, was good enough to counter Sega's

Phantasy Star series. Now T*HQ intends to keep the streak going with its sophomore effort for Nintendo 64, a simply titled yet intriguing game called *Quest 64*.

Quest 64 looks like a stripped-down *Zelda 64*, but as Nintendo's eagerly anticipated sequel is pushed back again and again, T*HQ's project is on schedule to be the first RPG for the system when it's released in the second quarter of 1998. And where *Zelda* is heavily relying on the name recognition generated by its three previous incarnations, T*HQ is hoping a tried-and-true perspective (that of *Mario 64*) and some basic RPG features will mean



While the game may look a bit like *Mario*, there are many more things to do and see, and many more characters to interact with (above). Items can be found anywhere (top left)

success on the 64-bit system.

The game looks a bit like *Zelda* and controls a bit like *Mario 64*. If this sounds like a lot of "looks likes" and "that of's," don't worry — *Quest 64* plays unlike any game on the market, and certainly unlike any available RPG.

"*Quest* is really a true RPG in the traditional vein," says Steve Ryno, vice president of product development. "The only thing it has in common with *Zelda* is its camera angles and viewpoints. *Quest* has more RPG-type battles, more in-depth quests in terms of talking to people, gathering items, and building up your character. *Zelda* just plays to more of the original game."



Since *Quest* is an RPG, a great deal of the game takes place indoors



While these shots only show the main character wielding a club, there will be many other weapons for players to find, such as swords and axes

Little is known about the game's story at this time, although the developers promise multiple characters to interact with, as well as three unique continents to explore and quest in. This won't be a game players can finish in one sitting, either. "Compared to most games, it will run long," says Ryno. "I would be lying if I had a specific time, but it will be the same length, if not longer, than a *Final Fantasy* or *Wild Arms*."

The game's combat system was designed with a nod to Square's 16-bit classic, *Chrono Trigger*. When enemies are encountered, the screen will lock in place, and battle takes place in real time from there. When players become equipped with different types of weapons, they will appear on the

character's iconic representation. Magic is also very traditional, with the 20 plus spells resulting from combinations of wind, water, earth, and fire. And unlike the rather limited combinations in *Wild Arms* (the game that *Quest* most strongly resembles), players can combine more than two elements at a time to come up with potentially devastating spells.

While *Quest 64* doesn't have the glitz of a *Final Fantasy VII* or the detail of a *Suikoden*, it should be, pure and simple, a fun, traditional RPG for N64. And though the wait for *Mother 3* and *Zelda 64* seems interminable, T*HQ should succeed the way Sony did with *Wild Arms* — in providing a great game to tide players over until the big one hits.

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Players will have to perform all manner of maneuvers to proceed



Quest 64's environments are always appropriately bright and verdant

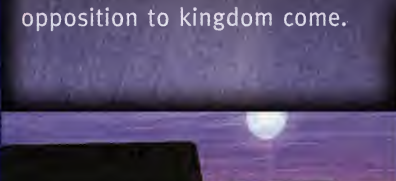


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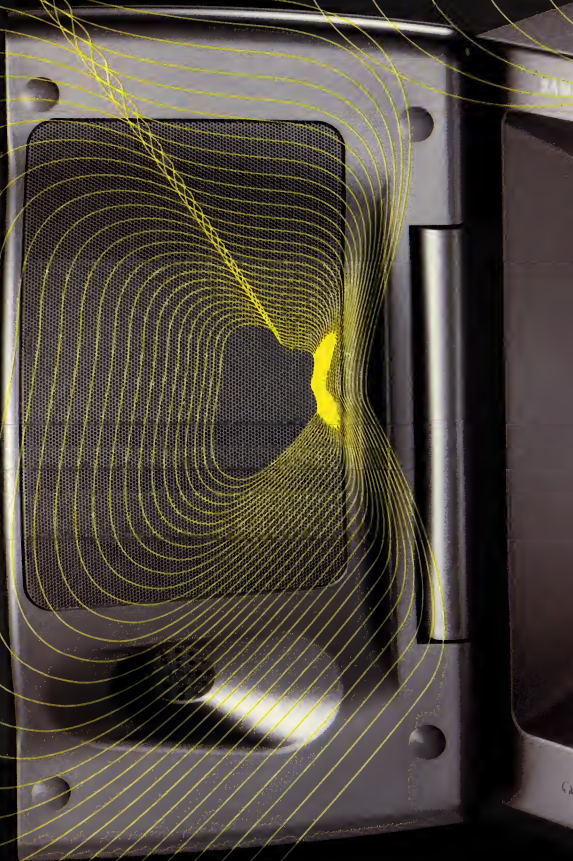
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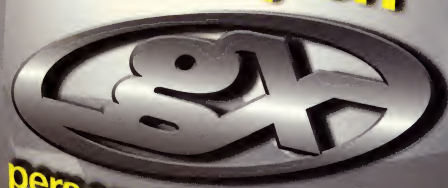
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3 SIGNS



ng alphas

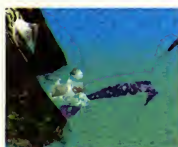
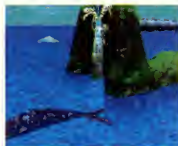
Panzer Dragoon Saga



Saga takes the best elements from the fascinating *Panzer Dragoon* universe and ties them into a cohesive storyline as featured in the game's comprehensive opening FMV sequence

Sega tries to deliver its coup de grace with *Panzer Dragoon Saga*, combining fantastic visuals and up to four CDs' worth of gameplay

Format:	Saturn
Publisher:	Sega
Developer:	Team Andromeda
Release Date:	Fall 1997
Origin:	Japan



Panzer Dragoon Saga will feature the same quality of graphics and range of weapons that have made the series world renowned

Despite Saturn's struggle to hold on to a significant share of the console market, the 32-bit machine can still lay claim to some of the industry's most memorable games. Indeed, back in 1995, one of the first titles from its limited early catalog to truly impress western gamers was *Panzer Dragoon*, and this at a time when Sega's machine was still only available as a Japanese import. Although hardly a revolution in terms of gameplay, it nevertheless represented the kind of flair and excellence in videogame design the Japanese seem able to achieve at will.

Its sequel, *Panzer Dragoon Zwei*, took the 3D environment one step further, providing as engrossing and polished an experience as its predecessor, albeit in a rather short-lived form. The in-game graphics were not the only visual aspect of the game that retained the quality of the original — the prerendered sequences were also just as stylishly choreographed and exuded the same cinematic feel, for which it deservedly received much acclaim.

When news first broke of this latest installment in the series, **Next Generation** was not surprised to learn it



would be an RPG, not a shooter. But, if ever there was a series whose accomplished melange of fantastic settings and characters was perfectly suited for an extended adventure-based quest, *Panzer Dragoon* is it.

Not surprisingly, the game takes



Panzer Dragoon Saga continues the series' tradition of great graphics and typically smooth animation

place in the same environment as its previous incarnations. Although prosperous thousands of years ago, the world is now on the brink of extinction. The use of biotechnology and genetic engineering in an attempt to clone the world's first inhabitants resulted in hideous and aggressive monsters. Over time, the world has deteriorated to the point where its current inhabitants have lost the power they held in the "Old Century" and are forced to live in permanent fear of the savage nature of their ancestors' creations.

In an attempt to get the world back on its feet, one country, known as The Empire, explored the ruins of Old Century cities and military installations, acquiring a multitude of weapons and other similarly useful items, eventually finding an all-important, powerful class of items called "relics." However, corrupted by its

newly found power, The Empire does not salvage the world but instead brings a legacy of war that claims thousands of lives. Out of the ruins of The Empire's tyranny, several groups of scavengers and hunters have survived by populating the wastelands.

The game begins in one such city of ruins, guarded by a group of former hunters turned mercenaries. The youngest member of this crew is Edge, the game's central character. A recently discovered relic is found buried among the ruins, but proves to be too valuable an item, and an unprovoked attack by an

Edge is saved by a dragon, who shows him a vision

aerial fleet intent on gaining the relic for themselves soon follows, killing every hunter except the game's hero. Left for dead, Edge is saved by a dragon, who shows him a vision of another, yet-to-be-discovered, strangely shaped relic, and the two depart on a quest to find it, as well as avenge the deaths of his friends.

In typical RPG fashion, information will need to be extracted from various characters Edge meets on his travels. This happens chiefly in the game's villages, where valuable objects can also be found. The exploration-driven nature of the game has made it necessary to abandon the on-rails approach of the prequels. As a result, Edge is free to roam his 3D surroundings, either in



ng alphas



The dragon accompanies the game's hero Edge on his quest to find a relic and avenge his friends' deaths. Throughout the game, players can raise their dragon's flying or combat abilities by training it well

towns or as he takes to the skies on the back of his flying companion.

The game's combat sections take place in the field stages and are viewed from a top-down perspective. Sega has adopted a traditional turn-based system, with the usual experience and hit points, which contrasts starkly with the all-out action of the previous *Panzer* titles.

Alert players can breed their dragon to perform better

Edge's enemies mostly take the form of the descendants of the world's fearsome genetic mutations created in the now distant past.

Due to the game's character duo, the control system is a complex yet logical affair, providing a variety of options whether in exploring or attacking mode. Interaction between the game's characters and objects is made easier with *Saga's* Lock-on Communication System, which will automatically target a

neighboring person or item.

The battle graphics are all presented in real time, with the game's Active Chase System adding a strategy element by highlighting danger areas and allowing players to change their position accordingly before the enemy's next series of attacks.

Interestingly, as the game progresses, Edge's dragon companion evolves through one of several developmental paths determined by the player's actions. By strengthening and restoring its shell, the winged organism can evolve into a new form, and this evolution has a significant effect on gameplay. Depending on how it's raised, the creature's combat and flying ability, together with other essential skills will be affected, so alert players can breed their dragon to perform better in certain situations and suit their individual preferences.

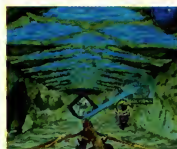
Team Andromeda, the group behind the first two titles of the series, is creating a fantastic-looking RPG. *Saga* continues the graphic splendor and wonderfully smooth animation the series has become known for despite the increase in detail, especially during the town and village sections.

Panzer Dragon Saga is currently planned for a fall release in Japan, possibly on as many as four CDs, and although it's difficult to predict how such a title will be received in the West, an American version is in the cards. However, translation of the game's 1,500 pages of text will doubtless slow the process down somewhat, so for now, U.S. gamers can only look at the pictures, hope, and wait.

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The dragon will evolve differently, taking on alternative characteristics depending on how players treat the creature



The game will use the previous games' targeting system by automatically selecting a weak area of an opponent or item

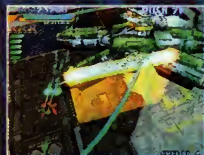
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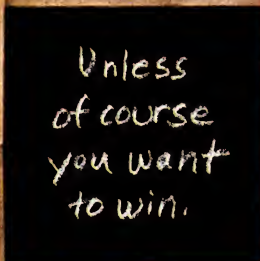
like flamethrowers.



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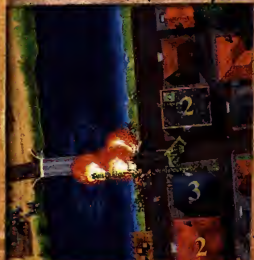
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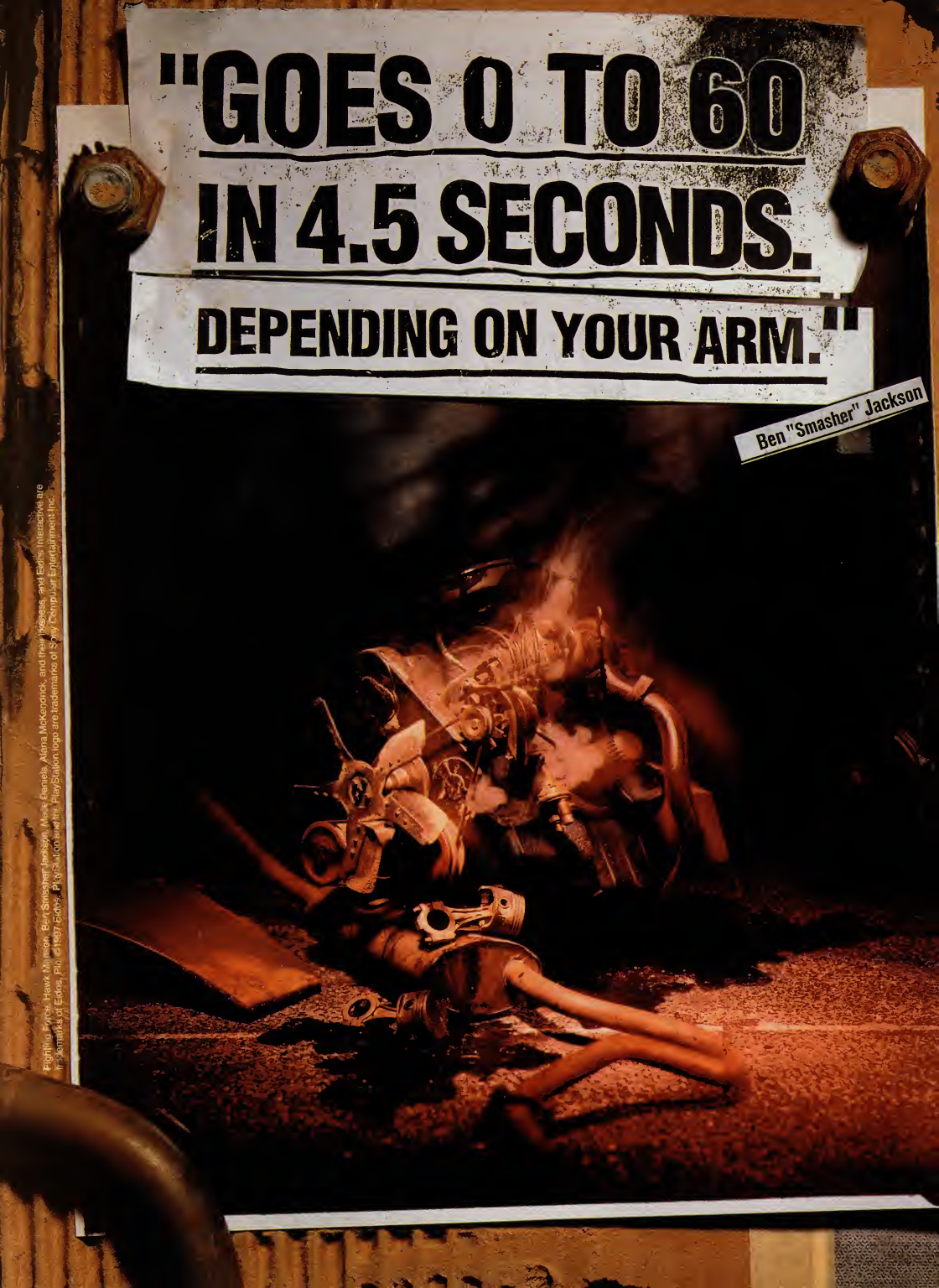
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10Six



Conversing with another avatar inside a *10Six* camp (above). A first-person view (right) of a typical camp as seen from its perimeter

Think a game can combine the realtime strategy and overhead perspective of *Command & Conquer* with the action and first-person perspective of *Quake*? SegaSoft does, and combining those gameplay elements are the least of *10Six*'s design challenges — not only will the game be played on the

Players receive one of the planetoid's million mining plots

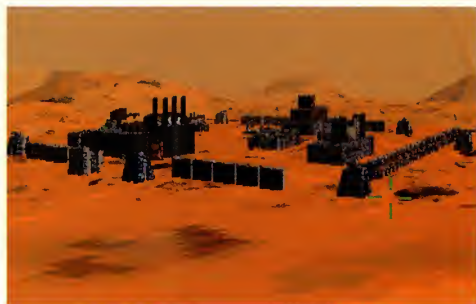


Ominous buildings offset strange terrain (above). Transium mining (top)

world's shakiest game platform, the Internet, support up to one million players, and require the maintenance necessary to keep its persistent world operating 24 hours a day, seven days a week, but it is also the first game to make use of the company's new Transactor technology. Revealed in **NG 32**, Transactor enables the game designers to add new objects to online games, and lets players take actual ownership of these objects.

To grasp the ambitious concept of *10Six*, players must first understand how a realm of one million gamers came to exist simultaneously. Taking place in the future, a rogue planetoid loaded with a valuable energy resource called transium has settled into the sun's orbit. The world government has contracted four major

SegaSoft has built an environment for one million users. But will gamers come?



Format:	Online/PC
Publisher:	SegaSoft
Developer:	PostLinear
Release Date:	Q1 1998
Origin:	U.S.

corporations to mine the transium. Under a contractual agreement to mine transium for one of those corporations, players receive one of the planetoid's one million mining plots to call their own.

With this type of off-world, Wild West mining environment, the intense



In battle players can select vehicles and direct them in attack. Here, a tank destroys the wall surrounding a transium well



Two of the four logos for the parent corporations responsible for 10Six mining operations. ToyCo boasts some surrealistic defense devices

gameplay comes in the form of defending one's own camp and raiding others' camps. When players defend their base, they can command their defenses from an overhead view. When raiding, which can be done in a group of up to six players, each invader is limited to a first-person view.

It's not all fighting, though. According to Executive Producer Larry Pacey, mining plays an important part in the game. "The same mining mechanic was within *M.U.L.E.*," says Pacey, referring to the classic title by EA, which inspired much of 10Six's design. "There was a resource and if you failed to mine enough of it, there would be no more mules available. It's the same type of cyclical situation here. There's a codependency of technologies and research."

As sure as resource management plays a role in camp development, so does the player's need to utilize the online community. "We've kind of coined the phrase that 10Six is a community based on paranoia," Pacey chuckles. "There's constant paranoia that your base is going to be under attack. So you've got to find friends." Beyond standard protection issues, the team feels



A raiding party of up to six players can beam into a base at one time. To maintain balance, the game enables six allies to offer support

compelled to make sure players meet and work with each other in a number of ways. "You can't do it all," says Pacey. "You can't mine, refine, and manufacture rovers, weapons, buildings, and structures. And your plot of land might not have a good amount of trantium."

Pacey's Nexus group appears to have a well-thought-out answer to every



Unlike multiplayer *Quake*, weapons in 10Six are visibly distinguishable. With the support of Transactor, players maintain physical ownership of individual weapons



design and balance issue that could plague this large persistent world. "We've designed the game," says Pacey, "so that when you start you have a two-week 'corporate protection' period. And that's where you have these big-ass droids that are indestructible. They're like super droids that will demolish anyone who comes to your camp. You can also lease

"The technology is going to be there to support a million people"

Larry Pacey, producer

these rovers for extended periods from your parent corporation, like if you're on a vacation in the real world."

Pacey believes the average player will need to be online once every couple of days to tend to the camp. And while **Next Generation** was quick to point out that there are potentially plenty of problems that may occur when players do not tend to their plot of land, Pacey was quick to explain the positives. "For the first time," he beams, "there's this alternate reality that is maturing and doing things when you're not there.



ToyCo defense vehicles (top) are characteristically bizarre, with a hood-mounted gun and a wind-up key



A map of the planetoid provides the background for a chat session (top). An armed avatar (above) glides through camp on a hoverboard

Your camp is continuing to mine its resource, refine it."

So how will **10Six** work? "We currently have 33 host servers across the country that can run spawned worldlets of **10Six** at the same time," says an enthusiastic Pacey, "so people based in any region are going to get the best gameplay. The reason is that we have a UNIX SUN system backbone. We're not using NTs, we're using mission critical SPARC IIs to handle the games. We have a lot of CPU power, and a lot of RAM."

When **10Six** ships, there won't be enough online players in the U.S. with the required hardware to fill every plot on **10Six**, and Pacey admits this. "The resources and the technology are going to be there to support a million people," Pacey says. "The game is still going to be fun with the tens or hundreds of thousands of people that take part in it."

Associate Producer Phil Gelber concludes: "There's no real winning or ending of **10Six**." That continuity has been one of the reasons behind the popularity of text-based MUDs, and if SegaSoft can channel it to a commercial project, it may find that before long, the world of **10Six** will start to fill up.



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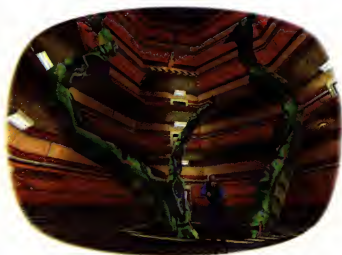
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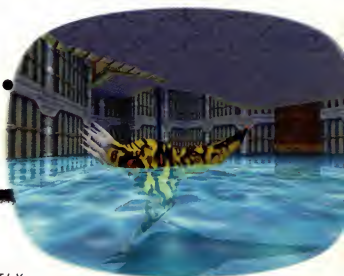
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Shadow Master



Nifty explosions and realtime lighting effects highlight the game

Hammerhead was formed a short while ago by Chris Stanforth, formerly of Traveller's Tales, known for side-scrolling platform games like *Mickey Mania* and *Toy Story*. The split, which was reportedly amicable, was based on Stanforth's desire to do something other than a 2D game, and the company's first effort, *Shadow Master*, is a good start.

At its heart, *Shadow Master* is a first-person shooter, in which the player pilots a kind of jet-powered RV — it provides a perfect example of what a developer can do when it breaks away from standard PlayStation library titles. With production design partly by fantasy illustrator and album cover veteran Rodney Matthews, whose work can be seen adorning records by Asia and The Scorpions, among others, *Shadow Master* is, if nothing else, a very pretty game indeed.

The game boasts a large number of impressive realtime lighting effects and explosions, and its occasional open area arenas provide an excellent sense of space. Above all, it remains faithful to its

Start-up developer Hammerhead shows what can be done on PlayStation when you ignore Sony

Format:	PlayStation
Publisher:	Psygnosis
Developer:	Hammerhead
Release Date:	Q1 1998
Origin:	U.K.



With production design done in part by illustrator and album cover veteran Rodney Matthews, *Shadow Master* looks quite good

SIGOURNEY WEAVER

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ng alphas



Some enemies are, of course, bigger and more dangerous than others

premise by maintaining a high rate of speed, a good frame rate, and generally a quicker pace than Psygnosis' recent, somewhat leaden corridor-shooter (and NG cover story, ahem), *Codenamed Tenka*.

Judging by the beta disc recently given a hands-on trial by **Next Generation** staffers, however, it's unclear whether *Shadow Master* can escape the "push the button, open the door" formula so common in first-person shooters. Also, despite the game's overall speed, the player-controlled vehicle had a nasty habit of grinding to a halt on contact with any of the outdoor areas' sloping walls. However, the game is still quite early in its development cycle, and there remains ample time for these problems to be addressed.

As PlayStation's game library begins to move into its third generation, titles like *Shadow Master* continue to show that programmers and developers who attempt to get as "close to the metal" as possible can always wring out new tricks.

The proof, as always, is in the playing, but as the first effort from a developer new to the system, it certainly looks promising.

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It remains to be seen, however, whether *Shadow Master* can escape the "shoot everything that moves" tedium of many first-person games

ALIEN

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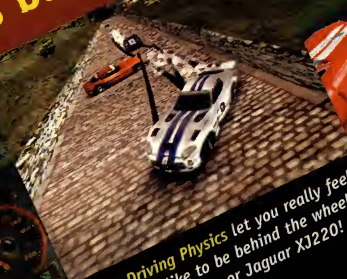
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WHERE THE CYBERDIVERSION INSTITUTE STANDS ON THE HEAT.NET 5-POINT PLAN.

On August 17, 1997, several members of the CyberDiversiOn Institute logged on to HEAT.NET.
Here's what they found:

(RATINGS ARE FROM 1 TO 5 DOVES, 5 DOVES BEING EXCEPTIONAL)



POINT #1: Making Internet Gaming Easy.

After trying every internet game network, we found HEAT.NET had the easiest start-up: Log on to HEAT.NET, get the free HEAT software and play free, OR purchase the retail box (includes six months' premium membership, HEAT CD with games and internet access from MCI). HEAT.NET's simplified start-up process will jump-start world peace by allowing people to start diverting their aggressive urges away from reality immediately!



POINT #2: Creating The Fastest Internet Gaming Experience.

We found that HEAT.NET delivers the fastest, smoothest gameplay on the net. With the new millennium and the threat of Armageddon looming, the faster every human can purge their evil Reptilian Complex buildup, the better for all of us!



POINT #3: Making HEAT.NET Compatible With Nearly Every Multi-Player PC Game.

Nearly every aggression-intensive game out there can be played on HEAT.NET! We played some of our favorites, like Quake™, Warcraft II™ and Scud: Industrial Evolution™, as well as games designed exclusively for HEAT, like DeathDrome™, Alien Race™ and Net Fighter™, plus some intense HEAT-only Quake Mods. This wide range of Reptilian Complex outlets puts the power of peace into the hands of the masses!



Quake™



Scud: Industrial Evolution™



POINT #4: Rewarding Cyber-Aggression With Points And Prizes.

We found that HEAT is the ONLY internet game network where aggression is rewarded with potential player points (they call Degrees) that can be redeemed for prizes. What an idea! If people play more often, they will quell aggressive urges more often and decrease real-life aggression more often. We believe HEAT.NET should win the Nobel Peace Prize for this point alone!



POINT #5: Creating Competition With Ladders And Events.

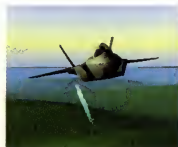
The ability to compete against the best players for prizes in automated, secure events and rise to the top creates an environment for Optimum Diversion Release (ODR), or the release of the most aggressive Reptilian urges, and the attainment of individual peace—which we believe will lead to a greater world peace!

Therefore, we, the CyberDiversiOn Institute, endorse HEAT.NET for its outstanding contribution in making the world safer for everyone. Please log on to HEAT.NET today and do your part for world peace!

Officially endorsed by Dr. D.G. Bartha
The CyberDiversiOn Institute

Joint Strike Fighter

Format:	PC
Publisher:	Eidos
Developer:	Innerloop
Release Date:	TBA
Origin:	Norway



The aircraft are virtually indistinguishable from the real X-32 and X-35

Flight simulators have, admittedly, not taken any huge leaps forward since the early 1990s, with the release of *Falcon 3.0* and several other amazing (at the time) games. Improvements to the genre have been mostly cosmetic since then, with the majority of enhancements falling into two categories of detail: terrain and aircraft.

While there are plenty of flight sims in development in which the aircraft is virtually indistinguishable from the genuine article, Innerloop's terrain technology (originally covered in **NG 29**) makes the company's entry into the market more than noteworthy. *JSF* is the first game to use the Norwegian company's Iterated Functions Systems (IFS) technology, which produces a level of detail and realism unparalleled in the flight simulation genre. The 10 million square miles of terrain in the game are covered with hills, trees, or ocean, all of which appear as far as the horizon.

The game itself is standard flight sim fare — there are four campaigns, each with several flight groups, ground targets,

A breathtaking new terrain engine makes the first *Joint Strike Fighter* game a force to be reckoned with



What would pass for rendered cut scenes a few years ago are now standard gameplay graphics — thanks to companies like Innerloop

and air targets. Players can elect to fly either of the two jointly developed prototype fighters for which the game was named: Boeing's X-32 and Lockheed Martin's X-35. *JSF* is the first game to feature these two craft, along with the latest in military munitions, such as Lockheed Martin's own Wind Corrected Munitions Dispenser.

With the sheer number of upcoming flight sims, and the intimidating shadow of *Falcon 4.0* on the horizon, it will be difficult for any one title to distinguish itself. But if there's any one game that has the potential, *Joint Strike Fighter* is it.

ng



Since the terrain is visible all the way to the horizon, players will have no trouble distinguishing potential enemies in the distance





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ng alphas

Respect Inc.



Welcome to Elmer City, where the key to being a successful gangster is having the right suit — and hat, and tie, and cuff links ...

Since the release of *Wipeout* almost three years ago, Psygnosis has continuously been a source of delight and surprise, and its latest, *Respect Inc.* from U.K. developer Pure Entertainment, is no exception. Rather than foist yet another futuristic science fiction game on the gaming public, Pure has based its "wacky" action/strategy title in a very different period: the Prohibition era, gangster heyday of the 1920s.

The game begins with the player's character fleeing his native Sicily and landing in Elmer City, Pure's take on the Al Capone-run Chicago. From there, players build their Mafia empire from scratch, muscling in on the territory of a mob boss named Spatz. The action unfolds in realtime 3D, seen from an isometric perspective, and the game follows a vaguely mission-based structure in which players pull off increasingly ambitious "jobs" in each successive level.

Since the game is thoroughly steeped in its own peculiar version of '20s mob culture, this is accomplished by earning and building up "respect," represented in a strangely concrete and literal way within the game by "respect points" and a "respect meter." In an odd touch, the amount of respect a player can earn is directly linked to how good a suit he owns and how well-accessorized

Psygnosis continues to develop its stable of unique games with a title featuring the original gangsters



Format:	PC, PlayStation
Publisher:	Psygnosis
Developer:	Pure Entertainment
Release Date:	March 1998
Origin:	U.K.

he is. The better the player's suit, including hat, tie, and even cuff links, the more respect it can hold — sort of the mob equivalent of a gas tank. This makes finding a good tailor, and keeping him safe, an integral part of the strategy. Hmm ...

In traditional gangland style, players then earn respect by recruiting additional members and squeezing local businesses for a piece of the action to generate cash, both of which are accomplished by using the "intimidate" button. Intimidated businesses are noted on the map by a change of color, and rival gangs can, in



An early sample of the city's architecture, rendered in high res

turn, come in and take them over again, which will then require the player to reintimidate them.

The types of personnel a player can recruit include tailors, of course, but also accountants for gathering up money, safecrackers for breaking into banks, drive-by shooters, and hit men. In addition to these specialists, players also have to recruit more general goons for extra muscle during a job, and to watch over and guard their territory.

None of this action takes place in a lawless vacuum. The police are everywhere, and are very tough cops indeed, but can be safely bribed — one at a time — to leave the player's mob alone, albeit briefly. In time, however, the player will oversee liquor rackets during Prohibition, steal the Mona Lisa, and even attempt an escape from Alcatraz after being locked up for tax evasion.

For authentic '20s atmosphere (or at



Rob a few banks, squeeze a few local businesses, take on the mob. All in a day's work for the well-respected hood



least a Hollywood-style version of authentic '20s atmosphere), the soundtrack will feature a mix of jazz and ragtime, switching musical numbers to keep the appropriate mood for the action. Typical weapons from the period, including shotguns, dynamite, and the

ubiquitous Tommy gun, will also be featured, along with the humiliating and feared Splat gun, which fires rotten fruit and takes down the rival's respect meter a peg or two in the process.

Currently in development for PC and PlayStation, the PC version will offer a two-player option, as well as 3D accelerator support. Whether the gameplay, which requires a delicate balance of action and strategy to work properly, can be as humorous and enjoyable as it sounds will have to wait for hands-on testing. *Respect Inc.*, however, certainly appears to be off to a unique start.



Characters were modeled and animated using 3D Studio MAX

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Front Mission Alternative



Detailed explosions and dramatic camera angles are just two of many factors that make *Front Mission Alternative* a game to watch

Few companies can call a title that sells 530,000 copies a disappointment, but after *Front Mission*'s release in February of 1996, Square considered it just that. It was one of the last games released for Super Famicom (the last U.S. release was *Super Mario RPG*), and Square elected not to translate it for the U.S.

But now, almost two years later, videogames have become more popular



Missions begin almost immediately after troops are flown to the battle

Format:	PlayStation
Publisher:	TBA
Developer:	Square
Release Date:	TBA
Origin:	Japan

than ever in the U.S. Games that would never have seen the light of day in the West are now seeing a good deal more exposure. So it comes as little surprise that Square would release updates of its most popular 16-bit titles. What is surprising, however, is that the company is releasing two updates: *Front Mission*'s true sequel, *Front Mission Second*, and a realtime version of the game, *Front Mission Alternative*. And alternative it is: The gameplay is vastly different from the 16-bit original.

FMA has, of course, received a

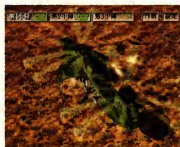
substantial graphics upgrade. The PlayStation's 3D powers have enabled Square to present the mechs in fully polygonal, fully texture-mapped splendor. The result: mechs that look better than any others on the system, and incredible animation and light-sourcing effects that put other mech games like *Carnage Heart* and *Virtual On* to shame. The game's look is also a great deal more mature than Square's other titles, with no anime-style, super-deformed characters or sentient animals — most of the characters in the game are humans, with an occasional robotic or cybernetic NPC.

There are many welcome features in *FMA*. Most importantly, Square has included support for the PlayStation mouse, something sorely lacking in many games that need it. *FMA* also includes the ability to save customized mechs and vehicles to memory cards. The game itself



Between missions, several rotatable views of units can aid strategy

ng alphas



The aircraft look good enough to belong in any PlayStation flight sim

is reminiscent of *MechWarrior 2* in that players receive their instructions at the base camp and then customize up to three units of three mechs each to send into battle. Customization is a very detailed process: Players can add different weaponry to every limb, from guns and missiles to huge anti-tank warheads and weapons powerful enough to level an entire city. One feature not found in *MechWarrior* — indeed, one that mech sim fans clamored for — was the ability to customize the appearances of the players' mechs. *FMA* lets players do just that — in fact, it requires them to in some levels. Proper camouflage is necessary to avoid disaster in more than one mission.

This is not to say that avoidance is the primary tactic in *FMA* — far from it, in fact. While there are occasional reconnaissance missions, most levels are straightforward search-and-destroy. These missions take place in more than 30 environments, from the standard post-apocalyptic blasted lands to ports, deserts, and beaches. There are more firefights and explosions in *FMA* than in any game in its class. These conflicts look and sound great — the music was composed by Ryo Arai, a popular dance music producer in Japan, and the sound effects are crisp, clear, and most of all, loud. Also, when players get tired of blowing up targets, they can turn their attention to the terrain; every building and vehicle is fully destructible.

If the game can beat *From's*



The action doesn't always take place in post-apocalyptic wastelands — conflicts in cities are quite frequent

formidable *Armored Core*, *FMA* could rule the mech genre for PlayStation. Even if it can't, the game should still be fun — and reasonably successful.

With the success of *Final Fantasy VII*, and the upcoming releases of *Final Fantasy Tactics* and *Bushido Blade*, Square is poised for a very profitable year. A game like *Front Mission Alternative* may not add a huge amount to Square's bottom line, relatively speaking, but it could be another company's flagship title. And that's not a bad spot for Square to be in, to put it mildly.

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But when missions do occur in barren areas, gameplay is just as intense

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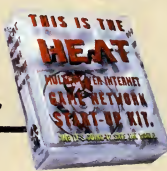
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What the CDI said about HEAT being compatible with almost every multi-player CD-ROM PC game, after playing their favorites, including Quake™, WarCraft II™ and Scud: Industrial Evolution™, as well as HEAT-exclusives, like DeathDrome™,

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Net Fighter™



POINT #4: OFFERING REWARDS FOR FREQUENT PLAYERS.

What the CDI said about HEAT being the only network to award frequent player points (Degrees) that can be redeemed for prizes:

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POINT #5: CREATING COMPETITION WITH LADDERS AND EVENTS.

What the CDI said about HEAT's automated, secure events and the ability to rise to the top against the best competition in the world:

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Powerslide



The cars' texture detail is already impressive and is set to improve further

Since 3Dfx Interactive gave *Powerslide* a prominent place in its exhibit at the last E3, Emergent's phone has been "ringing off the hook" with potential publishers eager to cut a deal, says Business Manager Greg Siegele. It's not hard to see why — *Powerslide* boasts a number of impressive features.

For starters, it's the only racing game to be developed for PC that will run at a consistent 60fps. In an early demo, the sensation was that of a game only a short step away from Model 2 standard, thanks to a low-level 3D engine and the assistance of the Voodoo chipset. The game has been developed from the ground up as a 3D-card-only title, with the bulk of the code written to the 3Dfx direct API Glide, and it pushes somewhere in the region of 250,000 polygons per second. (Sega's Model 2 board, by way of comparison, can handle around 300,000.) Siegele believes that with *Powerslide*, his team is pushing 3Dfx's card to its limits.



The varied off-road tracks put Emergent's true physics model through its paces

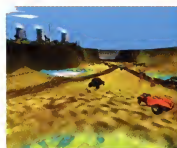
Emergent is working on what could be the most attractive example of a 3Dfx-based racing game yet

Format:	Arcade, N64, PC, PlayStation
Publisher:	TBA
Developer:	Emergent
Release Date:	Q1 1998
Origin:	Australia

"At 60fps, the card doesn't have a lot of pixel-processing power to spare," he says. "The real problem with the current chips is that you have to send all the position, color, and texture information for three processed vertices to the card for each triangle that's rendered. This occurs even when vertices are shared, as is usually the case. Therefore, if you have to render a lot of small triangles to the screen, the PCI bandwidth becomes a limiting factor, which is why I think we're really approaching the limits defined by the current crop of 3D cards."

As with almost all racing game developers at the moment, Emergent is concentrating most heavily on realizing a true physics model: The car dynamics in *Powerslide* are such that drivers can readily perform wheelies and handbrake turns; they can even drive up on two wheels to negotiate the narrow gaps and ledges of the off-road courses.

So accurate are the physics that car upgrades (purchased throughout the game with prize money) will genuinely



Powerslide offers many different surfaces on which players can race



ng alphas



Comparisons to Sega's Model 2 racer, *Sega Rally*, are not idly made. The texture quality is easily as good

alter the driving experience, from the grip of the tires to the stiffness of the suspension. All of these things then interact, on a wheel-by-wheel basis, with the track surface. As with Imagineer's *Multi Racing Championship*, *Powerslide* offers many different surfaces on which to race, and the player may encounter any number of them during one race. The result is that cars slip and skid on gravel, wet mud, and ice, and throw up great clouds of dust on the desert tracks, obscuring the view of drivers behind.

"The possibilities are only limited by the imagination of the track designers," says Siegle. "There'll be the more conventional tracks, allowing players to really get into the race craft inherent in the game, and then there'll be the extreme tracks that could open out into giant ice lakes with small, dirt-covered islands offering traction. Other tracks

might require a jump into a muddy pit, requiring a half spin in midair, or an icy aqueduct might give the players a luge-like experience."

The game is still early in its development cycle and won't see a PC release until the end of Q1 '98, with PlayStation, Nintendo 64, and coin-op versions to follow later in the year.

Emergent's team is currently engaged in building ever-more-complex and realistic car models — the examples in these screenshots are only temporary, with the exception of the Volkswagen Beetle.

Now that the 3D engine is fully optimized (and the programmers have become better acquainted with the Voodoo card), potential *Powerslide* players should expect more complex models with greater texture detail in the final version.

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Powerslide runs at an impressive 60fps with a 3Dfx card in place. These cars are early models and will soon be replaced by more familiar rally vehicles



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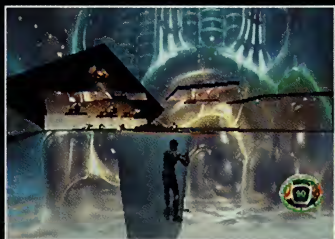
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Seven Kingdoms

Seeing as how Interactive Magic's slogan is "Strategy & Simulation," it stands to reason that the bulk of its titles would be strategy games and flight sims. I-Magic has no less than nine strategy titles in development, and differentiating between the bulk of them may be a bit difficult. However, one of them has a good chance of distinguishing itself from the pack. That title is *Seven Kingdoms*.

While many companies have successfully built on the *Command & Conquer* hype and released games that

It looks like *Warcraft*, controls like *Warcraft*, but plays like something else entirely

Format:	PC
Publisher:	Interactive Magic
Developer:	Enlight
Release Date:	December 1997
Origin:	U.S.

are similar enough to warrant a look (*Total Annihilation*, *Dark Reign*), no one has done the same with the *Warcraft* series. *Seven Kingdoms* (formerly known as *Ambition*) does, though, and with the help of a little game called *Civilization* for inspiration.

Players can choose from seven "tribes": the Chinese, Greeks, Japanese, Mayans, Normans, Persians, and Vikings. However, unlike *Civilization*, where the different cultures were only different because of their leaders' onscreen visages, *Seven Kingdoms* gives each tribe its own strengths and weaknesses. For instance, because of their heavy plate armor, the Normans move slower than other tribes but take far less damage from attacks as a result; their shields can block arrows, making ranged attacks not so successful. The Mayans, on the other hand, can move faster than other tribes, and their weapons do more damage, but their light cloth armor ensures far more damage from attacks. Each tribe can also summon a "greater



The hectic gameplay doesn't always come from battles; stray lightning strikes (above left) and snow flurries (above right) can cause problems for both novice and expert players



The Persians (above) and Vikings (top) differ by more than just their looks



ng alphas



Yes, this could be *Warcraft II* in front of a mirror, but the two games are very different. The replayability is much greater due to the seven tribes

being," a godlike creature capable of either causing huge damage (such as the Normans' Dragon and the Vikings' Thor), or providing noncombat bonuses (including the Japanese Mind Turner and Mayan Kukulkan).

The game also features some rather innovative military units. The most interesting is the Porcupine, a vehicle specifically designed to be destroyed by the player. These can be wheeled into enemy territory and fired at; upon impact, these vehicles will cause a rather large explosion that will wreak havoc on enemy formations and buildings. Other units, like the standard catapult, become more than ordinary when more powerful versions are researched. Basic stones are replaced with naphtha projectiles, which in turn become capable of hitting a wider area. Ballistae can be upgraded to reload faster, do more damage, and target a wider area.

Another new feature is the method of receiving new troops. Among the many structures workers can build is the Inn. At the Inn, unaligned soldiers

and workers from around the world gather, waiting to be recruited by any tribe. Also lurking in these buildings are spies, so players have to be careful whom they recruit. Since these units are essentially mercenaries, their loyalty to the tribe is very low. Boons and grants must be bestowed upon them to keep them in line.

Loyalty is very important in *Seven Kingdoms*, as the specter of rebellion is even more present than it was in *Civilization*. But in this case, when peasants rebel, they can subvert a village, or even form a new kingdom, which players will then have to conquer in due course. When mobile troops rebel, they can attack their home village, settle a new one, or even defect to another tribe. Hiring new troops can offset this eventuality, but it is best to keep armies as loyal as possible.

While PC gamers wait for *Warcraft 3* and the Meier-less *Civilization 3*, *Seven Kingdoms* could be an excellent title to tide them over. Having seven distinct tribes to choose from makes the replay value of the game skyrocket, which is fortunate. This game looks as if it's just plain fun.



For once, the concept art looks remarkably similar to the in-game structures



When greater beings (above left) show up, it's time to run for cover. Ditto for the naphtha shooters (above right) and other powerful units (top)

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Motor Raid

Having classics like *Out Run* and *Daytona USA* already under its belt, it would have been easy for AM2 to continually churn out similar titles for an eternally grateful audience. However, obviously keen to move away from the realistic contemporary vehicles and believable backgrounds that have inhabited its previous racers, the team has chosen to give its latest adrenaline rush a completely different feel.

This change in direction is most immediately obvious in visual terms. *Motor Raid* looks very much like a cross between anime classic *Akira* and *Wipeout*, with futuristic icons lining the tracks and brash, colorful design throughout. The circuits themselves are also reminiscent of the *Psygnosis* racer, with huge hills and drops replacing the usual flat urban settings.

The gameplay too represents a shift in

The racing coin-op genre motors on, courtesy of Sega's AM2 division

Format:	Arcade
Publisher:	Sega
Developer:	Sega AM2
Release Date:	TBA
Origin:	Japan



The congestion of the racing game scene has forced AM2 to move out of the modern-day-styled arena. *Motor Raid* adopts a theme that is pure science fiction, with tracks vaguely reminiscent of those in *Wipeout*



Racing game tradition dictates that the player is able to select from a number of models

direction. Not only has AM2 gone for motorbikes instead of swish sports cars (there are five different cycles with varying abilities), but the team has also brought in a *Road Rash*-style fighting element. Here, players are able to kick and punch other drivers via buttons that appear to the left of the handlebars. The only problem here, it seems, is that the realistic racing physics so beloved by driving game otaku have had to be simplified to make way for the combat element.

By the standards of a traditionally conservative design team, *Motor Raid* is a significant change in direction, and it will be interesting to see how coin-op fans react. Also interesting is the fact that the title runs on Model 2 rather than Model 3 — a sign either that Sega is keen to continue exploiting older technology, or that high-tech IGS (Image Generators) such as Model 3 are still prohibitively expensive. Whatever the case, a rash of sci-fi combat racers should be expected in *Motor Raid*'s wake.

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AM2 has obviously progressed from its *Hang On* bike era, bringing *Akira*-style vehicles to the racing genre

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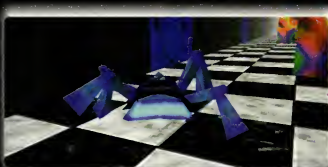
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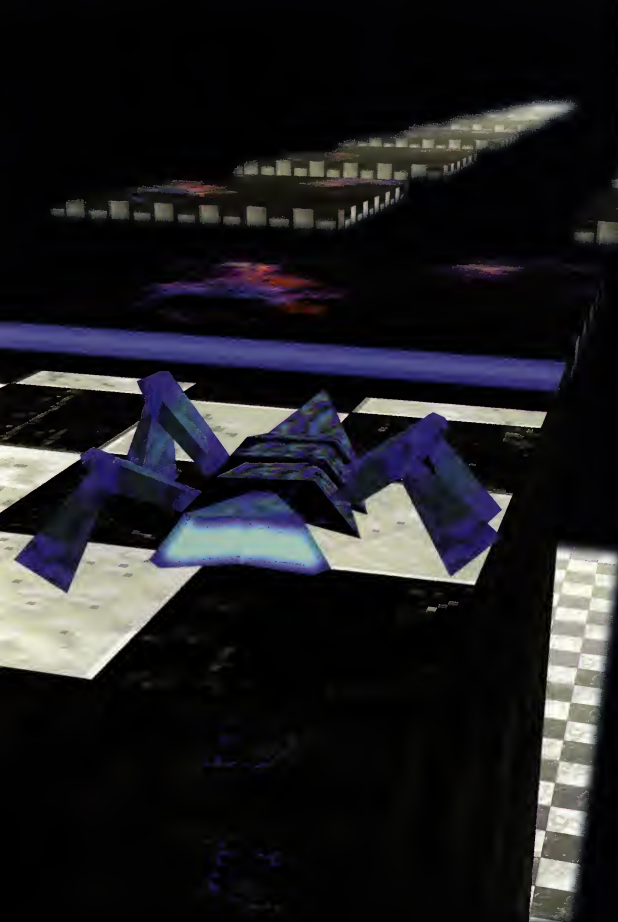
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Outwars



Aerial combat via the glider wings (above) is only part of the action, as players explore terrain and battle the "Hydran," an alien species

In its continuing quest to refine 3D action, Singletrac moves from PlayStation to PC



One of the bigger announcements made at E3 was the surprise acquisition of Singletrac by GT Interactive. Now owned by GT, Singletrac will consummate its marriage to the publishing giant once its last contracted project *Outwars* is finished for Microsoft.

Outwars is certainly one of Singletrac's more ambitious projects to date. From either a first- or third-person perspective, the game places the player in the role of a space marine on a mission to save an alien-infested mining colony. Sure, the plot is directly stolen from the film *Aliens*, but *Outwars* is more than standard run-and-gun fare wrapped around a 3D engine.

"You don't want to run in there fast and start shooting them up," says Producer Scott Campbell. "You have to evaluate the situation and then plan your offense." A big part of the strategy involves selecting the correct weapons for the different environments and delegating AI-controlled team members within the game's 25 plus levels.

The game also adds some dynamic flight models, not only borrowing a jet pack similar to the one in *Duke Nukem 3D*, but also giving players retractable glider wings so they can soar like the jet in Singletrac's own *Warhawk*: "We've definitely leveraged a lot of the physics algorithms from some of the other games," Campbell says, "but most of the code is new code."



Select a male or female character and one of several armored suits

Format:	PC
Publisher:	Microsoft
Developer:	Singletrac
Release Date:	Q1 1998
Origin:	U.S.



Campbell, a veteran PlayStation producer who worked on *Warhawk* and the *Twisted Metal* series, explains that the new code was required to take advantage of the PC's capabilities and create the game's wide-open exteriors and large, cavernous interiors. *Outwars* requires at least a P133 to run, and will take advantage of MMX machines and support several 3D accelerators, including the Rendition and 3Dfx chipsets.

Interestingly, *Outwars* is Singletrac's first development effort beyond PlayStation (its top-secret Nintendo 64 project remains hush-hush), and it seems to be a surefooted step into multiplatform game development.

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Making toast of an alien host (above). High in a jet pack jump (center)

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Einhandler



Few could have predicted just how much Square would benefit PlayStation when the RPG king chose CD-ROM and an existing system over cartridges and the then-Ultra 64. *Final Fantasy VII* could be the system's best-selling game so far. *Bushido Blade* and the *Tobal* series have shaken up the fighting genre. And now, *Einhandler*, Square's new shooter, promises to breathe more life into a steadily resuscitating genre.

Einhandler sports many features that may rekindle the spirit of *Gradius*. Foremost among those is seamless gameplay — there are no breaks between stages and no loading

Square has proven it can handle RPGs and fighting games, but are shooters a bit too much?



This *Blade Runner*-style scene shows just how impressive the graphics are. Enemies that look like locomotives are only the tip of the iceberg

Format:	PlayStation
Publisher:	Square
Developer:	Square
Release Date:	TBA
Origin:	Japan



The 3D aspect of *Einhandler* is what makes the game noteworthy — be it screaming down a highway or dodging fire from a huge boss

screens. The data continuously loads from the CD during the game, making for a rather hectic experience. The sense of urgency is especially prevalent in the first level, where players will begin with no weapons — and only by stealing from weakened enemies can the *Einhandler* fit itself with weapons.

Square's magic touch is evident throughout *Einhandler*. The developers are incorporating some truly breathtaking effects into the backgrounds, such as neon signs and afterburner fire, all of which showcase PlayStation's light-sourcing abilities unlike any shooter to date. The attention to detail is also evident in the weapons, which range from rocket launchers to machine guns to a blazing laser sword that leaves trails when used.

If after *Final Fantasy VII* and *Bushido Blade* Square can achieve hits with *Einhandler* (and *Front Mission Alternative*, see page 133), its already impressive repertoire — and its new affiliate label program — could have Electronic Arts looking over its shoulder before too long.

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Mon Nov 3: N64.com The State of Gaming Cheats Cheats are now being built into games on a regular basis, and are a solid part of life. Are gamers spoiled by cheats? Are they a good thing? *N64.com* reports. www.n64.com

Mon Nov 3: Voodoo Extreme Dig the Liner For five days straight Voodoo Extreme will give out either a 3Dfx mouse pad, 3Dfx T-shirt or a 3D accelerated game. On the final day of the contest (11/7/97) we will giveaway a Canopus Pure 3D 3Dfx based board — to win one of these spiffy prizes submit a "one-liner" to be used on our site for that day. We'll post the best one-liners each day and a lucky winner will receive one of the prizes mentioned. www.voodooextreme.com

Tues Nov 4: Ultra Game Players Hot! Hot! Hot! 1998 is just around the corner, and with the new year will come a slew of hot games. Which ones will be the biggest? Join *UGP Online* on The Palace to speak your mind! www.ugponline.com

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Wed Nov 5: SaturnWorld Japanese for Gamers *SaturnWorld* continues language lessons in the world of bits and sprites. This month: 50 new terms for RPG'ers. www.saturnworld.com

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Mon Nov 10: Zero Gravity The Great Game Idea Contest! Sick of lame game ideas? Think you could come up with a better one in your sleep? Well, prove it. *Zero Gravity* wants to hear your ideas. The best ones win a cool pack of free games. www.zerograv.com

Tues Nov 11: Ultra Game Players Bloodlines From *Castlevania* to *Symphony of the Night*, *UCP Online* traces the roots of Konami's vampire-infested adventure series. www.ugponline.com

Wed Nov 12: SaturnWorld Burning Rangers Special Get the information you've been searching for with a special *SaturnWorld* profile of the Sonic Team's latest game! www.saturnworld.com

Thurs Nov 13: Next Generation Online Super Q&A Day Join the editors of *Next Generation Online* as they shed light on your most pressing videogame questions. More than 20 questions will be answered in this double-sized Q&A. www.next-generation.com

Fri Nov 14: PSXPower History of Namco With *Tekken 3* just around the corner, *PSXPower* takes a look at Namco, from its humble origins to its current status as an industry leader. www.psxpower.com

Mon Nov 17: N64.com Namco and Nintendo's history You asked for it — the history of Namco and Nintendo. We bring you the competition, the power struggles (the saga!), and how the two major Japanese game companies are working it out today. www.n64.com

Tues Nov 18: PSXPower Frogger™ Contest Night Frogger is back! Jump over to the *PSXPower* Palace and join editors as they speak with Hasbro Interactive. Get your most pressing questions answered. An exclusive contest immediately follows, where you can win dozens of Frogger goodies. www.psxpower.com



Tues Nov 18: Ultra Game Players Lara's Back *Tomb Raider 2* is on the way. Meet up with *UGP Online* in The Palace for a first-hand account of what to expect from Core's adventure tour de force. www.ugponline.com

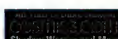
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Quake 64 (N64)
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Resident Evil 2 (PSX/PC)
San Francisco Rush (N64)
Starfleet Academy (PC)
Starship Titanic (PC)
Tomb Raider II (PSX/PC)
Ultima Online (PC)

Wed Nov 19: PC Gamer Online Blade Runner Contest Join *PC Gamer Online* in The Palace to find out about Westwood Studio's first real-time 3D adventure, *Blade Runner*. Stick around for an exclusive IGN/ Blade Runner contest immediately following. Free Westwood prizes and giveaways await! www.pcgamer.com

Wed Nov 19: SaturnWorld Croc Strategy Guide A level by level, course-by-course, dissection of the phenomenal Fox platformer. www.saturn-world.com

Thur Nov 20: PC Gamer Online Southpeak Contest Join *PC Gamer Online* for an exclusive contest sponsored by Southpeak Interactive. Don't miss your chance to win copies of their hottest Fall titles! www.pcgamer.com

Thur Nov 20: Next Generation Online Holiday Title Poll *Next Generation Online* will Poll it readers to find out which of the many holiday titles they are looking forward to the most. www.next-generation.com

Fri Nov 21: PSXPower Poll: Pick a Mascot. Crash Bandicoot never really caught on as the mascot for the PlayStation like Sony thought it would. Do you think Crash deserves another chance, or do you have an idea for a new one? www.psxpower.com

Sat Nov 22: Third Generation Game Contest Win the best sports game ever. Konami's *International SuperStar Soccer* for the Nintendo 64 will be up for grabs. www.3rdgeneration.com

Monday Nov 24: N64.com Top 10 A special report brought to you by N64 readers. Our readers' top 10 wish list and what games they hope to see coming to N64 in the future. www.n64.com

Tues Nov 25: Ultra Game Players Hex'n Who would have thought that *Hexen II* deathmatch could be so fun? Share your favorite deathmatch strategies with other *Hexen 2* fanatics in *UGP Online's* Palace room. www.ugponline.com

Wed Nov 26: PSXPower ONE Contest Join the *PSXPower* editors in The Palace as they talk with ASC Games about their latest PlayStation title *ONE*. Find out everything you ever wanted to know about the company, then stay around for the exclusive IGN/ONE contest immediately following the chat! www.psxpower.com

Wed Nov 26: SaturnWorld The State of Sega An in-depth analysis of Sega's performance with the Saturn, how it's going to end up, and what Sega should do to succeed with its next platform. www.saturnworld.com

Thur Nov 27: Next Generation Online 3dfx Game of the Week Wrap-up The Editors will look back to the best of the previous 3DFX Games of the Week and look forward to upcoming. www.next-generation.com

Thur Nov 27: Third Generation Personality of the Year Who do you think is gaming's most outspoken 'personality'? Could it be David Perry or Tommy Tallarico? How about Victor Ireland? Cast your vote. www.3rdgeneration.com

Fri Nov 28: PSXPower What's Next for Square? Square has a ton more games coming down the pipeline, but will any of them be as great as *Final Fantasy VII*? *PSXPower* weighs the pros and cons of *Parasite Eve*, *Chocobo's Mysterious Dungeon*, *Saga Frontier*, and more! www.psxpower.com

Friday Nov 28: PlayStation Nation Holiday Wish List Join *PlayStation Nation* as we talk about the most wanted games for the holidays. Send in suggestions, stories and your wish lists! www.psnation.com

Sunday Nov 30: Zero Gravity Tomb Raider 2 Give Away Can't get enough of the luscious Lara? Well, we've got her, and it's up to you to find her. If you can follow the clues to locate the lovely Ms. Croft (to be hidden all week long on ZG), then you will be entered in a drawing for a free copy of her latest adventure from Eidos! www.zerograv.com



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In search of the future of gameplay

Great videogame art (with no pictures)

A "videogame artist" is someone who makes great videogames, not someone who draws pictures that end up getting used in videogames (no matter how great those pictures might be). Last month I argued that precious few realize this crucial difference, and that even within the videogame industry itself, there are far too many people who don't realize that making videogames is a unique art unto itself. These people think that a game is merely a bunch of different art forms bundled together, slapped in a box labeled *David Hasselhoff's Attack Force 9-Iron* (or whatever other license the publisher has managed to acquire), and then advertised in **Next Generation**.

These people approach making a videogame as if they were making some kind of monster — bolting on limbs one at a time, hoping a lifelike entity will emerge. Like modern-day Dr. Frankenstein's, they take a storyline, pick some comic book character sketches, borrow a piece of music, commission some juicy prerendered CG sequences, sew them all together, give the cadaver a jolt of 10,000 volts, and sit back. And what they discover is that they can make games this way, but they're more likely to resemble inarticulate zombies than beautiful, sophisticated human beings.

Now this is a problem, because as long as the Dr. Frankenstein's of the game industry are given the run of the laboratory, their rowdy, rambunctious monsters are going to scare off all the more fragile, worthy creations. In other words, formulaic seen-it-all-before clones will hog all of the development budgets and all of the marketing attention — at the expense of more experimental, less immediately commercial games. And why? Because formulaic monsters are what everyone's come to expect, and on first impression, they seem awfully impressive.

Gaming's finest moments

So that's the doom and gloom bit out of the way. Let's get to the positive side of the coin. The good news is, of course, that although underrotten and often sidelined, great videogame art does exist, and there are some supremely talented videogame artists out there. The trick, of course, is pinpointing the strokes of genius that elevate some gameplay experiences to the status of greatness. Because videogames are more than the sum of their parts — interactive experiences that have to be played to be truly understood — it's difficult on a printed page to discuss their nuances. (Hence, the reason all **Next Generation** writers get paid such huge salaries. Ahem.) It's all about "feel" and "depth" and a sense of attentive interactivity — sensations not easily expressed in words.

But hope is at hand. There are pieces of videogame art that have been experienced and appreciated by so many gamers that their genius can become common points of reference. Hence, we can put them into words and discuss them here. These pieces of videogame art demonstrate the details that can help transcend the great gameplay experience

beyond that of sitting in front of a TV screen or monitor. These are the master strokes that can take a gamers' breath away. And in examining some of these touches of genius or these "great moments in gaming," we can hopefully learn more about this elusive art and encourage more of it. So, here goes — four examples of great videogame art:

• The *Space Invaders* music

It's the most simple game soundtrack ever — and possibly the best. A slow, low-pitched, mechanical "Duhm, duhm, duhm, duhm" beats over and over, increasing in tempo as the wave of descending aliens swarm closer and closer towards your base. As the *space invaders*' approach accelerates from a deliberate march to a frantic scuttle, the creatures move in time to the quickening rhythm. It's chilling, it's mesmerizing, it gets the adrenaline pumping, and it's the perfect accompaniment to the gameplay.

• *Doom 2*'s Tricks 'n' Traps

By the time players reach the Tricks 'n' Traps level of *Doom 2*, they know that hitting hard and early with the right weaponry is the best way to survive. Aim straight, keep moving, let 'em have it — that's the mind-set needed to win. It's also the mind-set that has led countless *Doom* players (myself included) to end up stuck — dying over and over again — after finding themselves outgunned, cornered, and defenseless against an insurmountable enemy force of

Typically, the "stroke of genius" is surprisingly simple and low budget

CyberDemons, Imps, Demons, and a Baron of Hell.

"It's all about level design," says John Romero, *Doom 2*'s designer. And this particular Tricks 'n' Traps level showcases his point perfectly. The touch of genius here is how he pulls the rug from beneath players' feet — but in a way that gamers have only themselves to blame if they fall. Here's how it happens: Upon finding yourself in a locked dungeon with a Baron of Hell and an army of CyberDemons (plus assorted other nasties), you come out all guns blazing, and the entire gathering turns and rips you to shreds. If, however, you wait at the back of the room and observe the events that unfold if the monsters are left unprovoked, you notice that a squabble breaks out and the Baron of Hell gets attacked by the others. Simply watch the fight from a safe distance, then waste in to finish off the weakened survivors. Easy — but only after you've figured it out for yourself. And then, there's that rush that only great gameplay can deliver — the feeling of total immersion in a robust game world that's harsh yet fair, and if you screw up, it's your own damn fault. Then there's the realization that a great game designer has just had you suckered for the past hour or so. And finally there's the

by Neil West

Neil West is
Next Generation's
editor-at-large



high of having solved one of gaming's great puzzles. Classic stuff.

• *Super Mario 64*'s triple jump

A videogame is essentially a conversation between a human and a piece of software. The software speaks via images on a screen, the player speaks via button presses and directional movements on a joystick. But because of the relative simplicity of videogames, most roles merely require the player to move a silent game character around a physical terrain without much conversation or political debate. So it's quite appropriate that simple physical commands (button presses) are used to command simple physical acts (left, right, leaps, rolls, and so on) in the game world.

There's a kind of synergy there.

The trick for game designers, then, is to make the most of this physical synergy. They must create a command system and player interface so seamless that the joystick movements and character motions seem one and the same. If they succeed, then players forget that they are holding a joystick at all (and hence the

reason they unconsciously start waving the joystick around in the air during hectic sections of play). Shigeru Miyamoto is a past master in this art — just watch any player execute Mario's triple jump in *Super Mario 64* and you'll know that Nintendo 64's showboat title is a fine example.

• *Warcraft 2*'s sound bites ...

Click on any of your subordinates in *Warcraft 2* and their attention will be signaled by a small snippet of speech. From a doleful "Yes m'lord" to a razor-sharp "At your service!" these sound bites are ingenious because they do so many things at once: 1) They let you know that your mouse click was on target, and you now have a character highlighted and awaiting further instruction; 2) They do so in a way that doesn't add graphical clutter to an already crowded game screen; 3) They tell you what rank of person you have just highlighted — again, in a way that lets players focus their gaze elsewhere; 4) They add tremendous color and an extra human dimension to the game scenario, turning shallow character animations into real people; 5) They're funny!

When you click on a poor peon and he responds with a resigned, "What is it?" you know that he knows that you're about to make him do something laborious and very possibly suicidal. Or when a female elfin warrior coolly observes, "You don't touch the other elves that way," you feel almost guilty. But this comedy isn't just facetious, it provides welcome comic relief from what would otherwise be a no-nonsense,

ng special

businesslike game. A master stroke from the designers at Blizzard.

Stroke of genius

So those are four examples of great videogame art that most gamers will have firsthand experience with. But there are plenty more. Think of your own favorite gameplay moments — the details or elements that you cherish highly. I'll bet that both your examples and mine have the following points in common:

1) The "stroke of genius" only works in the context of playing the game. It's not a piece of art that would be considered a big deal on its own. For example, you'd have a hard time playing *Space Invaders* "music" at a party — it only works when your hands are on the controls.

2) Typically, the "stroke of genius" is surprisingly simple and low budget. Certainly it doesn't require a fraction of the seven-figure development budget allocated to many of today's blockbusters. Often it's a simple question of timing or planning rather than a question of throwing money at a problem.

3) It's not something that can be easily put into words. Often you can see that the "stroke of genius" would not have appeared impressive in the game's original design document (and it's not something that will seem irresistible to any gamer reading the game packaging). Explaining how in, say, *Virtua Fighter*, "the

more you play, the more you realize how much there is to learn" not only seems unconvincing (doesn't every game claim this?) but also a little disheartening ("you mean I never actually get to master it?"). The point is not what the game does but how it does it — you have to play to understand.

4) These "strokes of genius" are hardly ever graphical. As Sid Meier brilliantly observed in **NG 31**, "Good games take place in the player's mind, not on the computer screen. We can never put images on a TV or computer screen that are as realistic or as vivid as the images that we can conjure in a player's mind once they start to get drawn into a game. So even simple graphics, when combined with good gameplay, are perfectly good enough. And in this way, a programmer or a designer can 'create' better graphics than any artist."

And you know what? He's 100% right. And all these examples serve to prove his point.

The sum of all the parts

So what conclusions can we draw?

First, it's easy to see that bringing in an expensive piece of art from the "outside" isn't the answer. Because outside art is self-sufficient, it's impossible to integrate it flawlessly into the interactive experience. The soundtrack to *Wipeout*, for example, includes some top-rate music from some of the world's best dance acts, but it merely

plays while the game unfolds — it's not part of the interactive experience.

Second, it's not about graphics. It's what a videogame artist can do to make the game feel right, play right, and behave right. It's not how the game looks on the screen that's important, but the fantasy game world that is created in the players' mind.

Third, the best ideas are usually the simplest ones. It's about understanding how the game works and harmonizing all of its elements — design, interface, graphics, sound. It's like cooking a meal — taking ingredients and creating something new. And as any great chef will tell you, the smallest touch of salt can go a long way.



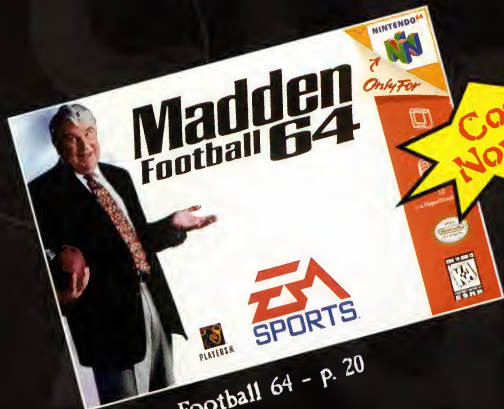
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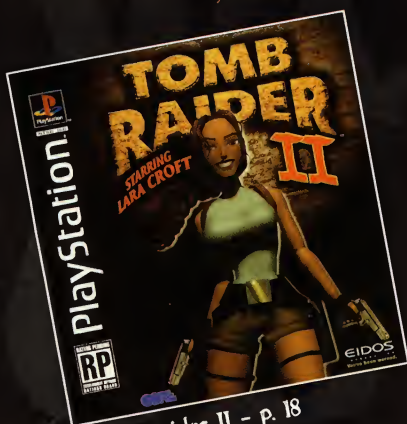


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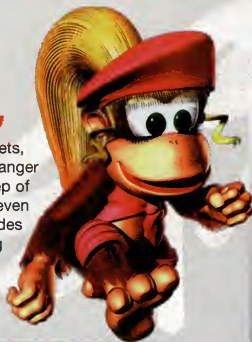


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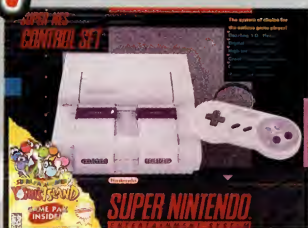


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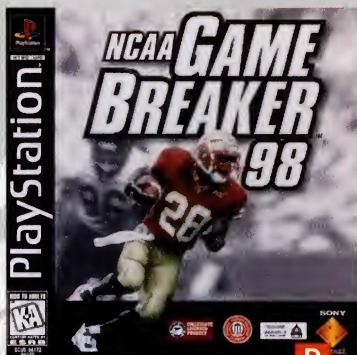
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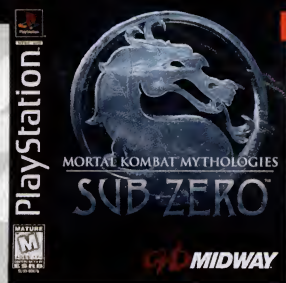
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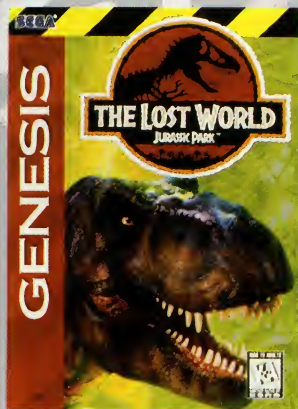
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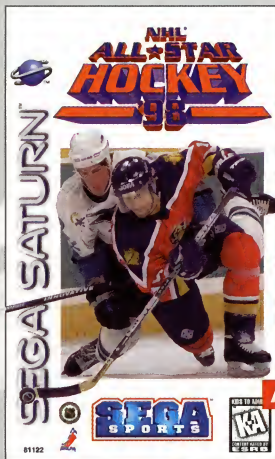
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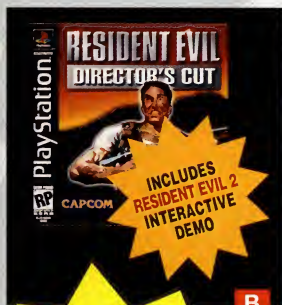
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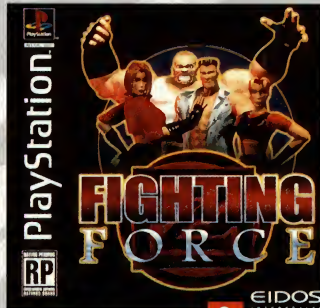
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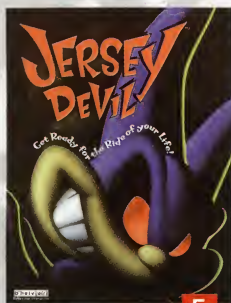
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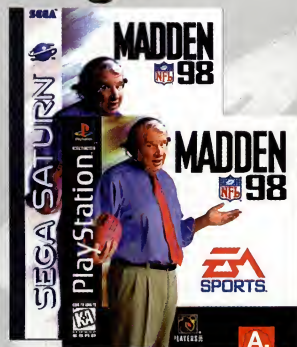


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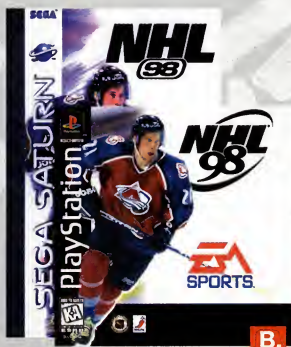




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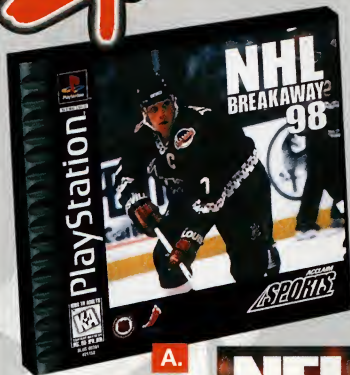
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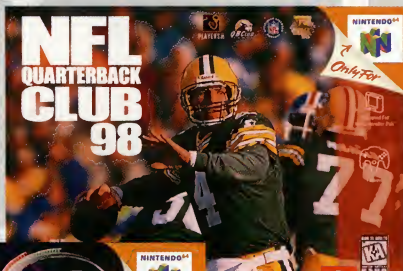
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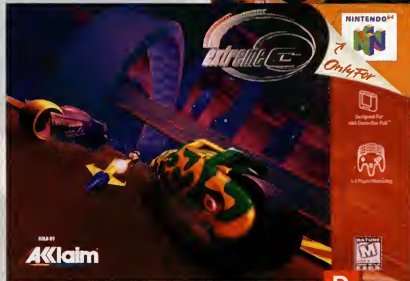
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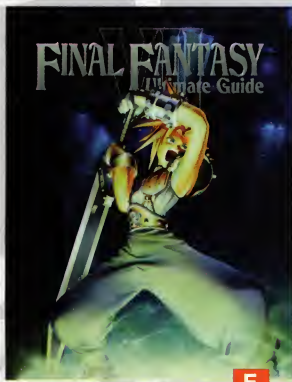


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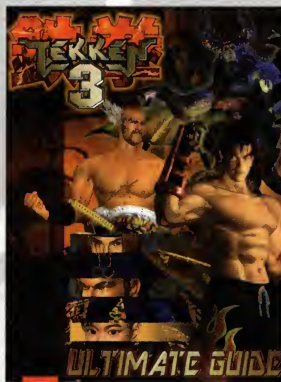
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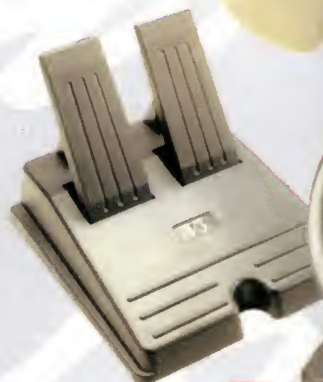
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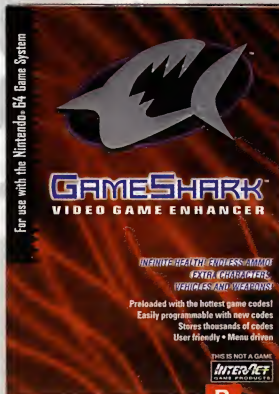




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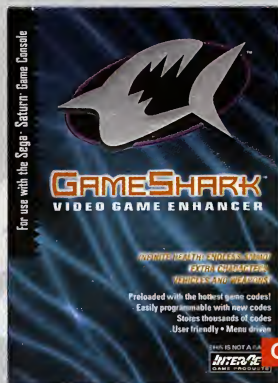
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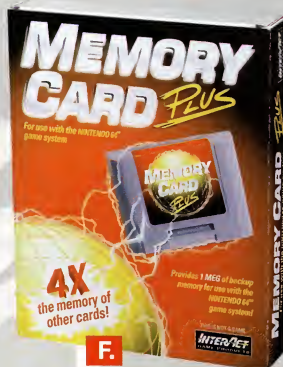
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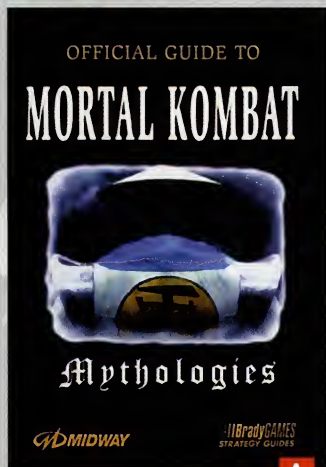
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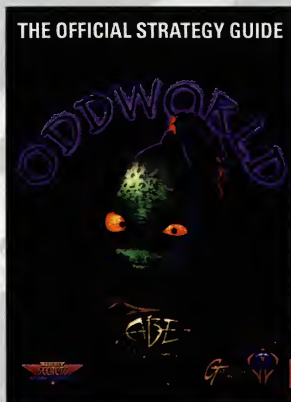




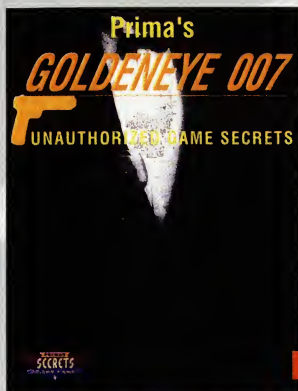
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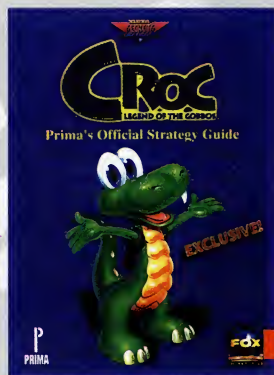
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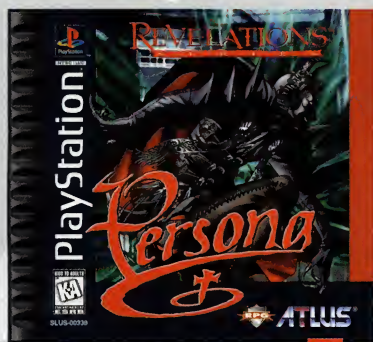
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Tetrisphere Nintendo 64 **NFL GameDay '98** PlayStation **PaRappa the Rapper** PlayStation **Creatures PC**
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finals

Don't waste your money — read this first

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Next Generation's Star Guides provide a quick way to get our general impression of a game. But unless you read the review, you're only getting half the story. To get all the information you need to know before making a purchasing decision, read the whole review; don't stop at the stars.


★★★★ **Revolutionary**
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★★★ **Good**
 A solid and competitive example of an established game style.

★★ **Average**
 Perhaps competent — certainly uninspired.

★ **Bad**
 Crucially flawed in design or application.

 Denotes a review appearing on the Next Generation Disc.

 Denotes a review of a Japanese product.

Nintendo 64

Tetrisphere Publisher: Nintendo Developer: H2O

The puzzle game finally makes an appearance on Nintendo 64 in the form of *Tetrisphere*, a game that has been in development for several years and was originally slated for release on Atari Jaguar. Players familiar with existing Tetris titles won't really have a frame of reference for *Tetrisphere*, other than that tetris pieces are still patterns of four blocks. In *Tetrisphere*, the player drops matching pieces to dig through layers of tetris pieces that surround a white glowing orb.

One of the reasons *Tetris* was a huge hit was its simplicity. *Tetrisphere* is anything but simple. It takes quite a bit of playing around to master the basics of gameplay. Despite this, *Tetrisphere* is fun.

Single-player games have several modes to choose from: In Hide and Seek and Rescue, players dig to the core of the sphere to reveal an image or rescue a "little buddy." Puzzle mode, however, is the most insidious and interesting of the single-player games. Here, the player has a set combination of drops and moves to



Play hide-and-seek with your little buddy in the surprisingly complex game *Tetrisphere*

eliminate the tetris pieces on the sphere.

Surprisingly, *Tetrisphere* is most successful as a two-player game, similar in feel to *Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo*. Two spheres are set up side by side — as pieces are removed from one player's sphere, they're dropped onto the opponent's side.

Graphically, *Tetrisphere* doesn't live up to most other Nintendo 64 games — the most obvious flaw is an annoying pop-up as the player rotates the globe. However, on the music side, H2O does provide some of the best tracks on any N64 title, with nearly a dozen different tunes to choose from.

Nintendo 64 is starved for any puzzle title, and *Tetrisphere* fits the bill. Although it has flaws, the game should serve to steal away many painless hours, especially in two-player mode.

Rating: ★★★

PlayStation

Abe's Oddysee Publisher: GT Interactive Developer: Oddworld

2D is dead... or is it? The people over at Oddworld have thumbed their nose at the rest of the development community that is seemingly never without some reason for doing the next texture-mapped 3D shooter. However, it's a righteous defiance. The truth is, as uninnovative as Abe's *Oddysee* is in terms of technology — and to a large extent, gameplay — it's still one of the deepest, most involving, and most cleverly designed games ever released on PlayStation.

Players take control of Abe, an outstandingly designed character in an interesting, original world. Abe possesses a host of possible actions and interactions through what the designers at Oddworld call Gamespeak.

Gamespeak allows Abe to converse in a limited fashion with the other inhabitants of Oddworld in an effort to save his fellow Mudokon from being turned into lunch by the evil meat-packing conglomerate, Rupture Farms. Of course, Abe can also run, jump, climb, and perform most other feats common (plus a few that aren't so common) to a side-scrolling character, all of which are



Abe's Oddysee from Oddworld shows there may be some life left in 2D gameplay after all

among the most smoothly animated movements we've ever seen. The result is a game that is extremely reminiscent of Delphine's classic *Flashback* and before that, Jordan Mechner's *Prince of Persia*, but with far better character design and control, as well as deeper puzzles.

Action gamers are likely to be disappointed by the occasionally slow pace, but speed is traded for a considerably more cerebral set of challenges that require a great amount of persistence, observation, and thought. Puzzles generally involve getting past difficult obstacles by stealth (tiptoeing, hiding in shadows), possessing others (there's a nifty skill for using other life-

forms' weapons and abilities), or simply navigating difficult passes. Either way, once players have worked through the first twenty minutes, which serve as a training ground, the level of challenge increases dramatically. However, thanks to features such as infinite lives and the ability to both pick up immediately where you died and save at any time, the game rarely becomes frustrating.

Along the way, an engaging and motivating story is brought to life through outstanding voice acting and narration in conjunction with adequately directed, prerendered FMV. Sure, it ain't polygons, but Abe's *Oddysee* is still the be-all and end-all of its chosen style of 2D gameplay.

Rating: ★★★★★

Ace Combat 2 Publisher: Namco Developer: Namco

Sequels. There are a million of them, and it's a sad fact that a lot of the time they're the same old same old in a shiny, new package. Fortunately, that's not the case with *Ace Combat 2*. In fact, it's exactly the opposite.

The first *Ace Combat* (titled *Air Combat* in the U.S.) wasn't all that great,

rating

PlayStation

but it was as close to a "real" flight sim as anyone had ever seen on PlayStation, and it duly impressed a lot of people. *Ace Combat 2* is going to impress a lot of folks too, but for slightly different reasons.

First, *AC2's* graphics are simply nothing short of fantastic. Everything is smooth and fast, and just check the explosions—you won't find nastier explosions anywhere, short of setting off an M-80 while holding on to it. Drop a load of incendiaries, and it looks like the real deal.

But the game isn't just eye candy. The enemy AI is sharp. Maybe too sharp. Players who don't pay a lot of attention to what's going on will quickly find hostiles on their six who know exactly what to do with a heat-seeking missile. In fact, in some of the ground attack missions, the enemy combat air patrols are so ferocious that just getting past them alive will become the crux of the



Get them before they get you!
Ace Combat 2 is a garden of deadly delights

mission, let alone bombing the target.

One really sweet option is the game's compatibility with the Sony dual analog joystick. It can be set up for either left- or right-handers, and it lets the pilot use one stick for guidance and weapons and the other for the throttle, pretty much the way it is in actual fighters.

With more than twenty planes to fly, thirty death-defying missions (most with branching mission paths), and complete support for Sony's dual analog joystick, *Ace Combat 2* should keep a whole bunch of weekend warriors strapped in to the TV.

Rating: ★★★★★

Croc: the Legend of the Gobbos

**Publisher: Fox Interactive
Developer: Argonaut**

Croc is Fox's ambitious attempt to step up to the cross-genre, action/adventure/platformer plate. Developer Argonaut has faithfully recreated all of the characteristics and gameplay elements found in precedent-setting innovators like *Super Mario 64* and *Tomb Raider*, and tried rolling them into a well-



Fox's Croc is left stumbling in the dark and in the wake of greater games

rehearsed hit production.

Unfortunately, somewhere along the way, the crafty mascot candidate has lost some of his shine by way of compromise.

Graphically, *Croc* is a technical wonder, sporting some of the smoothest polygons and animation this side of N64. The fact that

PlayStation

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NFL GameDay '98

**Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment
Developer: Sony Interactive Studios**

Ever since the launch of PlayStation, *GameDay* has been the absolute best-playing football game available, year in and year out. However, when *Madden* returned last year, it took the immediate market-share lead. Not because it was a better game, but because it had a bigger name. If the same thing happens again this year, then there is a serious problem with the game-buying public.

The developers of *GameDay '98* make up one of the rare teams that really gets it. Last year, *GameDay '97* was simply the best-playing football game, with spot-on control and game mechanics that made even

the toughest plays seem within reach—with practice. Sony could have easily slapped a '98 on the box, updated the rosters, and called it a day—and gotten away with it. Instead, the developers just went back to work, creating an unbelievable polygon engine and tuning the gameplay even further so players of all levels could enjoy a game of rare pleasure. While *Madden* is still trying to get old school done right in the 32-bit age, Sony has, for the third year in a row, successfully reinvented the wheel and made it spin.

The polygon players allow for several advances over previous football games. The most obvious improvement is the game's graphics, since the polygons allow for texture-mapped uniforms, complete with the proper logos and numbers. The animation is excellent, and the players look great when running, tackling, diving, passing, catching, kicking, and just about everything else. More important, however, is the depth the 3D engine brings



The real 3D space allows players to run through holes as opposed to always having to run outside

to gameplay. Since the polygonal players occupy 3D space, they cease to feel like simple points of contact, but rather more like real physical bodies to work around. This is especially significant in the running game, which *GameDay '98* does better than any football game around.

The only knocks on *GameDay '98* are an incomplete (and sometimes inaccurate) stat engine and an AI that seems to be basically the same as the one from last year. However, that still means the AI is far and away the best in the business.

In the end there is no denying that *GameDay* is the best football game series around, more impressive still when you consider that it continues to evolve, season after season. *GameDay* has simply done it right.

Rating: ★★★★★



The grappling tackles are a tip of the hat to last year's Quarterback Club, but GameDay '98 has perfected them

PlayStation

Argonaut (16-bit developers of *StarFox*) was able to pull off this feat on a supposedly less powerful system is a strong testament to the untapped possibilities of PlayStation. The way he waddles, runs, sidesteps, and dangles provides the kind of precision control that made *Lara Croft* a gameplay goddess. But in the race against such revolutionary competitors, *Croc* trips over his own aggressive enthusiasm.

While look and control weigh heavily in favor of the title, gameplay seems to lag a few notches behind. Repetitive and overly simplified level designs seem to pitch *Croc* squarely to gamers under the age of 12. The noticeably infrequent enemy encounters also cause the game to teeter back and forth across the line, dividing eye candy from real gameplay. After a few hours, most players will be left wondering where the designers hid the rest of the game. In the end, the game provides just enough pretty, painless entertainment to keep gamers

pacified, but there's not enough challenge to certify *Croc* a niche next to the classics it so readily seeks to emulate. It's just enough to avoid having its name used against it.

Rating: ★★★

Fantastic 4
Publisher: Acclaim
Developer: Probe

Despite all the talk about the "new" Acclaim, someone seems to have let an "old" Acclaim title slip through (and equal shame on Sony's third-party, "quality control" approval personnel, who were clearly sound asleep when this came across their desks). Like the worst of Acclaim's licensed games for the last eight years, this one takes a venerable piece of pop-culture property, in this case Stan Lee's *Fantastic 4*, and reduces it to dismal side-scrolling action — using "action" in the loosest sense of the word.

Up to four people can be tortured



Fantastic 4 looks terrible and plays worse — there's no excuse for this

at once by this travesty as they move across the screen from left to right, controlling big, disjointed sprite characters in the classic (read tired) *Final Fight* style. The only concession to innovation is that players scale as they move into and out of the scene, but there's so little sense of depth that it's nearly impossible to tell when a player is lined up with a potential target, especially with the larger boss creatures.

Control is nonexistent, the music sounds like it was stolen from a '70s porn film, and every character and enemy is so poorly modeled and animated that it must have taken all of a single weekend to finish the graphics. Pretty much the only fun we found in the game was making the *Fantastic 4* use their ridiculous-looking super moves to "dance" to the music — although at that point, it was a little like making jokes at the scene of a traffic accident. Dismal art + dismal graphics + dismal gameplay + dismal level design + dismal sound = dismal game.

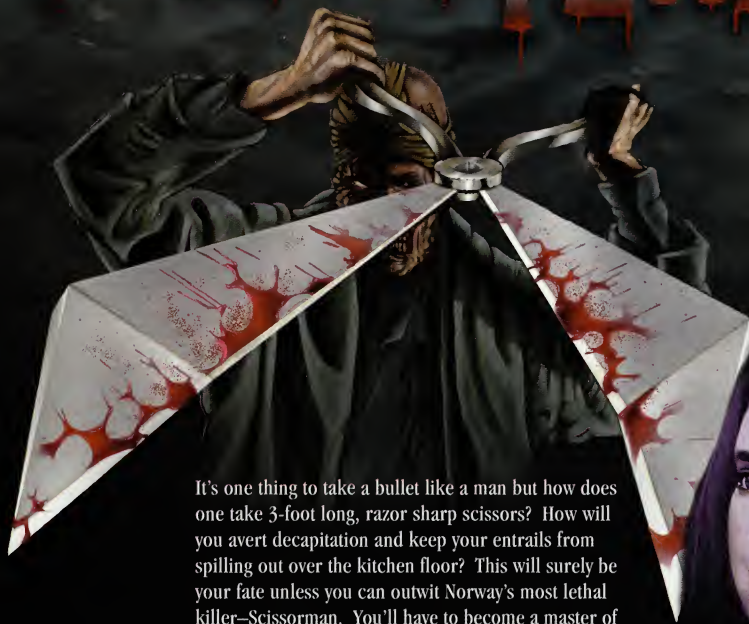
Before we give *Fantastic 4* its one star, we'd like to apologize to the other games we've given one star. Most of them are merely terrible and don't deserve to be grouped with the likes of this kind of calculated deception. Note to Acclaim: if you're trying to revamp your image, the first step is to quit knowingly trying to sell gamers such complete, utter, useless crap. This is not a game. This is an insult.

Rating: ★

The upside:
WENCHES.
 The downside:
THE PLANK.



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- ★ Bone-chilling sound effects.

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PlayStation

Ghost in the Shell

Publisher: T*HQ
Developer: Exact

Undoubtedly, many players are going to buy *Ghost in the Shell* purely because they're fans of the anime it's based on, and they won't be disappointed, especially since the game has ten minutes of new anime footage. However, a few minutes of FMV is thankfully not the only reason to pick up *Ghost*: Simply, this is a good game.

Loosely based on Masamune Shirow's anime and manga, *Ghost in the Shell* is a pure third-person action shooter in the strictest sense of the word. The entire game is spent controlling a Fuchikuma, or spider tank, equipped with bullets, grenades, and rockets. It's highly maneuverable, and can walk up walls and across ceilings, which results in some very interesting level designs.

Developed by Exact, the same team that made the *Jumping Flash!* games for Sony, the company was



Ghost in the Shell may have little to do with the movie, but it is a solid shooter

picked by Shirow himself for the job. *Ghost* is as far from *Jumping Flash!* in style as a game can get, yet it still manages to retain some of the same feeling, particularly that odd floating sensation experienced while piloting Robbit.

While the twelve levels do provide interesting variations on the same theme, such as time limits and floor-to-ceiling gymnastics, as with all shooters the game begins to feel tedious after a

while. Perhaps more vehicles or the ability to change from third to first person would've helped curb the monotony.

As it is, though, *Ghost in the Shell* is a fast and fun game that also happens to have a great license attached to it.

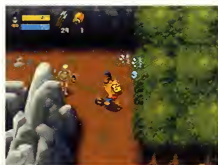
Rating: ★★★

Herc's Adventures

Publisher: LucasArts
Developer: LucasArts

With the number of *Star Wars* titles LucasArts has been pumping out as of late, it's refreshingly surprising to find a game like *Herc's Adventures* being released. Blending classic gameplay with downright hilarity, *Herc's Adventures* has succeeded in making sprite-based games seem not so dated.

The setting is ancient Greece, and Persephone has been kidnapped by the lord of the underworld, Hades. Consequently, things have become rather unpleasant topside, so it's decided she



The perspective in Herc's Adventures makes it difficult to enjoy the humor

should be rescued. It may be called *Herc's Adventures*, but there are three characters available to play as: the aforementioned Hercules; a young but spry Jason (of ... and the Argonauts fame); and the underrated Atlanta. Each has his or her own strengths and weaknesses, which greatly affect gameplay.

Humor plays a large part in *Herc's* and is in fact an integral element of gameplay. Health is restored by eating

The salt spray hits your lips as you look into the deep blue. The frigate creaks and the plank bobs. Will this be the end? Welcome to *Shipwreckers*, life on the high seas at its swash-buckling best. Wield flame throwers and hurl lightning bolts as you man cannons and command great vessels under the Jolly Roger. Battle one to five other players. The rewards are great, the puzzles daunting and the excitement high—just watch your step. The plank is a cruel mistress.

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PlayStation

All that



Throughout the game, you'll run into various styles of rapping that you'll have to contend with and master in pure Simon Says fashion

Pop culture meets PlayStation with *PaRappa*



The cinemas lie at the crux of *PaRappa*, making the overall journey from the game's beginning to end one enjoyable ride

PaRappa the Rapper

Publisher: SCEA

Developer: SCEI

In an attempt to quell the clamor among avid PlayStation import enthusiasts and further its goal of providing a console software library of infinite depth, Sony has finally released the Japanese hit, *PaRappa the Rapper*, Stateside. The rapping mascot took the Japanese market by storm, selling well more than 700,000 units and successfully propelling an

"alternative" approach to videogaming into the mainstream.

The game itself consists mainly of a series of story-ordered cut scenes evenly connected by interactive segments. Following the hip and cutesy storyline, with character designs by children's illustrator Rodney Greenblatt, you play as PaRappa, a

hip-hop canine out to win over the girl of his dreams, a flower named Sunny Funny. The interactive segments challenge the gamer to follow an unplayable character's "rap" in Simon Says style using various buttons on the controller for different words and phrases, keeping the beat so PaRappa correctly repeats each verse. While this style of control and play is not at all as easy as it sounds, it is simple: The fact that each scene changes slightly depending on how successful the player is and also that a special ending can be uncovered for mastering the controls and keeping the "rap meter" at "U rappin' Cool" adds a sliver of depth to an otherwise linear experience.

But if the genuine thrill of playing *PaRappa* isn't necessarily derived from gameplay, why is the

game so good? After all, any game that presents itself as more fashion than function (which *PaRappa* does) should easily fall into a ratings category with mediocre, uncreative titles.

But that's just it. *PaRappa* is fiercely creative, presenting itself so seamlessly it manages to irresistibly draw the gamer into a highly novel, unapologetically 2D cartoon world, populated with onion-headed karate teachers and cake-baking chickens. It's incredibly hard not to find the slyly hip parody elements humorous, and it's equally difficult not to notice the painstaking aesthetic perfection that has been layered into the colorful and flawless cinema segments, the insanely catchy soundtrack, and the perfectly paced character development. The game is so well-produced and carried out that you won't even notice that the gameplay itself is based on the most primitive of concepts. Simply put, style over substance has never been better done than in *PaRappa*.

Certainly, more than a few PlayStation owners will find *PaRappa* boring, pointless, and completely inane. But the truth of the matter is, *PaRappa the Rapper* is a game that must be played to be fully comprehended, enjoyed, and valued, if not for its contribution to general videogaming, then for the link it forges between the videogame industry and pop culture novelty at large. It's beyond recommended.

Rating: ★★★★★



PaRappa seems aimed at becoming the motto guru for the late '90s videogame generation with his saying: "I gotta believe!"

PlayStation

gyros (it's Greece, remember?), while houses and stray sheep can be picked up and thrown as projectile weapons. And, in a very shiny-like touch, there's even an inflatable cow decoy.

With fourteen worlds and forty levels, ranging from Egypt to Sparta and every Mediterranean locale in between, there's a lot of game in *Herc's Adventures*. However, humor and size can't completely carry a game. *Herc's* suffers from an almost too rigid gameplay style, which consists mostly of walking around and hitting wave upon wave of enemies. Plus, the skewed 2D perspective makes it sometimes difficult to tell where players can and cannot go.

However, with its lighthearted nature and ability to not take itself too seriously, *Herc's Adventures* provides a satisfying diversion from the plethora of dark and gritty games on the market.

Rating: ★★

Madden '98

**Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: Tiburon**

EA's most coveted franchise has seen its share of controversy over the last few years. *Madden '96* was a no-show, then *Madden '97* (despite its commercial success) was loaded with flaws. Now with *Madden '98*, EA is trying to put its game back on top. Unfortunately, while the developers at Tiburon were trying to work out the bugs from last year's *Madden*, the developers at Sony were busy creating the first truly polygonal football game. Therefore, before the first snap was ever taken, *Madden '98* was already

behind the competition.

Even a quick comparison of screenshots shows that *GameDay '98* looks like a 32-bit game while *Madden '98* more closely resembles its 16-bit heritage. Until *GameDay* came along, the graphics and play in *Madden* were the best around. Sadly, not anymore.

On the field, *Madden '98* is essentially the same as the series has always been, which is part blessing and part curse. The control is slippery, the play is fast, and yes, once again, there are money plays — the kind that work every time against any team or defense. The defensive AI (EA likes to call it "Liquid AI" — as opposed to what? "Solid AI"? — is an improvement over last year, but still falls short. The biggest disappointment is the running game, which is nonexistent thanks to the complete lack of precise control and poor blocking. Since there's no reason to run on a play, every game turns into a quarterback shoot-out, with QBs often getting more than 600 yards passing in a game (and that's with five-minute quarters). Ridiculous.

The *Madden* series continues to excel in its presentation, stats, and options. No game has a more complete stat engine or comprehensive list of options, but as always, a game is judged by how it looks, and most important, how it plays. Granted, despite some problems, at least the gameplay is solid — a distinct improvement over last year. However, it's too little too late, and stacked against the jaw-dropping *GameDay*, good is no longer good enough.

This particular dynasty has passed.

Rating: ★★



At one point EA Sports' *Madden '98* was the football game every fan dreamed of. Too bad Sony showed there's a better way



MLB '98 looks good and plays well. In fact, there's nothing wrong with it, there's just very little that's new, interesting, or exciting

MLB '98

**Publisher: Sony Computer
Entertainment
Developer: Sony Interactive
Studios**

The series formerly known as *MLB Pennant Race* has dropped a good portion of its lengthy moniker and much of the baggage that came with it. Last year, *Pennant Race* was nothing more than a poor 32-bit imitation of the classic Genesis game, *World Series Baseball*. To top it all off, the game didn't even come out until the very end of the baseball season. However, *MLB '98* has taken a new approach, and while it still has a ways to go, it's definitely on the right track.

The game has moved to polygonal players, and the texture-mapped models are the best looking of any baseball game. On the other hand, the 3D stadiums in *MLB* are the worst of any 32-bit baseball game, although they are much more realistic in size than the tiny fields seen in *Triple Play '98*.

The gameplay in *MLB '98* is a hybrid set of features clearly culled from several other games. Once again the batting and pitching interface works nearly identically to *WSB* on Genesis. In the field the game actually plays a lot like *Triple Play '98*, with a speed burst at the fielder's disposal. However, the one area in which *MLB '98* excels more than any other PlayStation baseball game is the speed of play — finally, a baseball game in which the player doesn't have to wait thirty seconds between batters.

There's no denying that *MLB '98* is a good, solid baseball game that surpasses *Triple Play '98* in many respects.

However, in the grander scheme of console baseball, *MLB '98* does nothing to advance the genre and can't even clean the cleats of Sega's *World Series Baseball '98* for Saturn.

Rating: ★★

Porsche Challenge

**Publisher: SCEA
Developer: SCEE**

Whenever hype precedes a game, the end result will almost always be a little disappointing. No game, no matter how good, can live up to the godlike status bestowed upon it by months of anticipation and excitement. *Porsche Challenge*, which was released in Europe earlier this year, built up quite a head of steam before it finally landed on U.S. shores. But lo and behold, this one almost lives up to the buzz.

It may seem like a novel idea to have an entire game based solely on Porsche Boxsters, but any racer that insists on having just one kind of car, no matter how cool, had better have a few tricks up its sleeve. Thankfully *Porsche Challenge* does. The presence of six different drivers, each with a unique driving style, takes care of the problem of having just one kind of car. While there are only four tracks, the first being Stuttgart, Porsche's actual test track, the rest have side roads and shortcuts that open up as players progress, ensuring a good amount of replayability.

Realism plays a large part in *Porsche Challenge*, from the accurate car models, rendered from Porsche blueprints, to the realistically difficult handling. Some gamers who are familiar

rating

PlayStation



The graphics in *Porsche Challenge* are slick and polished, much like the Boxsters themselves

with the arcade physics of games like *Rage Racer* may find the control hard to handle, but then they'd probably also find actual Boxsters hard to handle at high speeds.

Porsche Challenge falters when it comes to its split-screen mode. There's no external view, since the cars were too big to include onscreen and still have a decent frame rate. There's enough pop-up in the two-player as it is. However, this is a minor quibble. Like *Psygnosis'* excellent *Formula 1*, which also stressed simulation over arcade, *Challenge* has chosen to take a road less traveled, and screams over it.

Rating: ★★☆☆

Street Fighter EX Plus Alpha

Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Arika

When we gave the arcade version of *Street Fighter EX* two stars back in **NG 27**, the game deserved it: The animation was poor, the graphics blocky, and generally, it didn't feel like a *Street Fighter* game at all. But Arika has saved the day, adding thirteen new characters,



The polygonal characters in *Street Fighter EX Plus Alpha* are the sharpest around, with some real nice textures as well

all kinds of extras (Training Mode, Team Battle, etc.), and generally making the game feel right.

To call *Street Fighter EX Plus Alpha* a 3D game is, however, somewhat misleading. It plays just like any (or all) of the 2D SF games, seen squarely from the side, with no movement into or out of the screen. But it is presented in beautifully detailed polygons. The new characters animate just as well as any from *Tekken 2*, and Capcom and Arika have made them very playable and distinct.

The game is very similar to *Tekken* graphically, but it replaces *Tekken's* multipart throws and excessive combos with the traditional special moves found in the SF series. Trademarks like Ryu and Ken's Dragon Punch and Guile's Flash Kick translate remarkably well to the new engine. The exceptions are the big characters, Zangief and Darun, who look awful, although they are still extremely well-animated.

The game's best feature, however, is the Expert Training Mode. Each character is presented with sixteen moves or combos of increasing difficulty. For each combo performed successfully, a secret character is moved a point closer to being unlocked. This is not only a great way to release secret characters, but it encourages players to learn new techniques and provides a challenge to expert players.

With the current glut of bad 3D fighters, it's refreshing to know that Capcom can learn from its mistakes and make a *Virtua Fighter* Remix-type improvement to an originally mediocre effort. While we wouldn't recommend continuing an ostensibly 3D series this way (i.e., not really 3D at all), *SFEX Plus Alpha* is an outstanding title even non-SF devotees will enjoy.

Rating: ★★★★★

Saturn

Last Bronx

Publisher: Sega of Japan
Developer: AM3

As Sega's last Model 2 fighter, and possibly the final Saturn 3D fighter by the time it arrives in the U.S., the aptly titled *Last Bronx* may well represent the end product of the company's 32-bit evolution.

The game is a fusion of *Virtua Fighter 2* and *Fighting Vipers*, with a decidedly Hobbesian viewpoint.

Zaimoku may have the same number of polygons as Wolf, but his design is decidedly grittier. *Last Bronx* is populated with thugs, and the gameplay and move list follow the premise without so much as blinking. Weapons-based combat with VF response transform matches from stately martial arts trials to short, nasty, and brutish struggles for survival. And, truthfully, it's kind of refreshing to be nasty and brutish.

Saturn's conversion team seems to have licked the FV cage problem by upping the resolution to VF2 level but dropping Gouraud shading. Unfortunately, the characters still flicker at close quarters, proof that the programmers didn't work as hard as



Last Bronx's moves have a violent, visceral thrill that other chop-socky fighters lack

they could have. It seems as if developers are approaching the asymptotic side of Saturn's graphics curve, which only lends credence to the rumors of a new Sega console in the works.

Although weapons are handled differently from *Dynasty Warriors* or *Soul Edge*, it still feels appropriate, as if Nagi's Sais are extensions of her body rather than mere instruments. Like AM2, AM3 makes its characters masters of their art instead of practitioners.

To see the next step in Sega fighters, look at the VF3 test bed known as *Fighter's Megamix*. However, *Last Bronx* shows that the current system still has a long way to go before becoming obsolete.

Rating: ★★★★★

Marvel Super Heroes

Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Capcom

For anybody else, a 2D fighting game is a death wish in disguise. For Capcom, it's a cash cow. The company has three successful franchises: *Street Fighter*, *Darkstalkers*, and *Marvel Super Heroes*. However, these franchises sell well because their designers know how to make a great game and not just push sprites around onscreen.

Marvel Super Heroes is the second *Marvel* game to make it to Saturn. It improves upon *X-Men: Children of the Atom* by including the Infinity Gems, which originated from the *Marvel Comics Infinity Gauntlet* miniseries. With special moves, each gem enhances the player's abilities, for instance, providing extra speed or armor. Like its predecessor, the game differs from the *Street Fighter* series because it uses huge sprites and two level playing fields.

Technically, it's one of the few games left coming to America that works better on Saturn than PlayStation. VDP1's sprite-handling capabilities allow it to push the graphics onscreen better than on



An extra RAM cart adds a subtle visual flair to the Saturn version of *Marvel Super Heroes*

Sony's platform. A RAM cart option lets the game use Sega's 1MB RAM cart to load in more frames of animation for significantly more detailed action, although at the expense of some speed.

Fortunately and unfortunately, *Marvel Super Heroes* caters to the fan base, not the gamer. The combat system is merely an incremental improvement upon *X-Men*, which was only slightly different from *Street Fighter II Alpha*, which was only slightly different from *Street Fighter II*. It's a good system, but it's essentially the same game. Newcomers to the series should give it a spin, but veterans might want to wait until the fabled *X-Men vs. Street Fighter* arrives at the end of the year.

Rating: ★★☆☆

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Saturn

Saturn Bomberman

Publisher: Sega
Developer: Hudson Soft



Although still a relatively unknown entity to mainstream gamers, *Super Bomberman 2* on SNES was considered by videogame enthusiasts to be one of the greatest multiplayer games ever created. (So good, in fact, that it ranked No. 3 on *Next Generation*'s "100 top games of all time" in *NG 21*.) This pedigree works both for and against *Saturn Bomberman* — the basic gameplay goodness of the series isn't tarnished, but nevertheless, the latest offering from Hudson Soft doesn't attain the classic status of *SB2*.

The most distinguishing new feature of *Saturn Bomberman* is the ten-man, widescreen view of the Battle Mode. By hooking up two of Sega's Six-

Way Multi-taps, prospective bombers can experience a whole new level of calculated mayhem that exceeds in scale and intensity (though not in simplicity, balance, and sheer gameplay perfection) the four-player Battle Mode in *Super Bomberman 2*. The biggest drawback of the 10-player mode is that the game characters and power-up icons are reduced to such a small size that players can't help but be confused at times. There is a normal screen mode that offers smaller yet more easily discernible mazes for up to six players.

In terms of gameplay, *Bomberman* has been and always will be about multiplayer gaming, and there is plenty of the flavor of the series to appeal to new gamers and old fans alike. Still, the game is likely to appeal more to the uninitiated than to the hard-core *SB2* player. That's because the inclusion of



Bomberman allows insane 10-player action via a couple of Sega's 6-Way Multi-taps

new icon power-ups and special kangaroo power-ups will seem like blasphemy to *SB2* fans while everyone else is enjoying the new strategic possibilities of these additions without feeling as if some perfect formula has been tainted.

One area where *Saturn Bomberman* does exceed the classic is in its single-player mode. There are now four one-player modes that offer a decidedly less frantic (but more cerebral) puzzle-gamelike experience that far surpasses in quality the one-player game in *Super Bomberman 2*.

In the final analysis, *Saturn Bomberman* offers a lot of strong gameplay without a lot of the graphical flash and superficial pizzazz of other 32-bit games. If it wasn't for the fact that one of its predecessors is considered by many to be gameplay perfection, *Saturn Bomberman* would probably receive much more acclaim. As it is, the game is probably the best addition to the *Bomberman* series since *SB2*, but that's an awful tough act to follow.

Rating: ★★★

PC

Atlantis: The Lost Tales

Developer: Cryo
Publisher: Interplay

French developer Cryo has carved a small niche for itself in the graphic adventure market with previous titles like *Dune*, *Lost Eden*, and *Versailles 1685*, all stylish games with interesting storylines that don't break much new ground in gameplay mechanics. *Atlantis* makes a few concessions to new technology and offers a good time, but it doesn't break



Atlantis is pretty, but while the gameplay is painless, it's not as good as the graphics

the Cryo mold.

Beginning in *Atlantis*, then spreading to four other continents, the game follows the story of Seth, who begins his first day as a servant to the Atlantean Queen Rhea and right away discovers there's a plot afoot. The game uses prerendered scenery, which boasts stylish design and intricate detail — admittedly drop-dead gorgeous stuff. While each locale is basically composed of still screens, the game uses a process called "Omni 3D," so players can use the mouse to pan around a full 360 degrees,

both horizontally and vertically in each area. The effect is a little vertigo-inducing at first, and in the end doesn't add much to the usual graphic adventure point-and-click mechanics, but it does help to break up the static feel prerendered games are prone to.

The good-sized world is populated by quite a number of prerendered NPCs, all of whom speak with CD-supplied voices. The acting ranges from pretty good to pretty bad (about the best one can expect), but Cryo also uses a technique called "Omni Synch" to make

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the lip movements match the words — in theory it's clear at times the process isn't perfect yet, matching up just well enough to call attention to the fact that it never quite gets it just right.

Still, the game's rough spots are few. Most of the puzzles are pitched at the right level of challenge (including a cross-dressing solution, which, coming on the heels of *Final Fantasy VII*, makes two such episodes in two different games in two months — just synchronicity, or the beginning of a weird trend?), and it takes about the usual 30 or 40 hours to finish. Nicely done, but not much new.

Rating: ★★

Dragon Dice

**Publisher: Interplay
Developer: Interplay**

Some pen-and-paper games survive the translation to computer game quite well. Others, for whatever reason, should have been left out of the computer arena altogether. *Dragon Dice* falls into the latter category. On paper *Dragon Dice* is a fine game: Two to four players square off with armies of dice, with each dice representing one character in the army. The players then battle for territory on the game map by rolling their dice and removing dice that have been killed. The winner is the one who conquers all of the terrains in the land.

The first problem with *Dragon Dice*, the computer game, is that it's displayed only in a low-resolution window. It appears the developers have



Dragon Dice is disappointing however you look at this tiny window

never heard of full-screen mode, and in fact the window size can't be changed at all — even the Win 95 maximize button is grayed out. Unless the size of the desktop itself is changed, you're stuck with that tiny window.

Once players get into the game itself, they will find that the core game consists simply of clicking a button to roll dice. This may be great for a tabletop game, but it's pretty boring for a computer game. Beyond rolling the dice there's little interaction, just basic onscreen notes showing the outcome. The computer AI is OK, but nothing special. A decent human player shouldn't have too much trouble besting it.

The game does support up to four

players over a LAN, which might help it appeal to dedicated players of the tabletop game, except for one minor problem: *Dragon Dice* isn't the most stable game on the planet. In fact, **Next Generation** loaded it on two different systems and it eventually locked up every time. Crashes never occurred in the same place, but they were consistent enough that it was rare players could finish a single game.

Fans of the tabletop version of *Dragon Dice* would be better off finding a friend and using their money to purchase additional sets of real dice. It's a lot more fun than playing on the computer, and there's never a worry about the game crashing.

Rating: ★

Extreme Assault

**Publisher: Blue Byte
Developer: Blue Byte**

Only thanks to an excellent use of 3Dfx acceleration does *Extreme Assault* manage to create an awesome landscape, as well as realistic 3D objects, all while maintaining a decent frame rate. Unfortunately, it doesn't help much, and players will quickly become bored, since *Extreme Assault* offers only simple gameplay and no story to speak of.

The game is divided into four operation areas, each of which is divided into ten or so missions; the exact number varies. The only hints as to why the hell any of this matters are given in quick, premission briefings, which inevitably boil down to, "Kill everything in sight." Any primate with an opposable thumb could quickly master what passes for gameplay, which essentially requires locking on a target (press one key), firing (hold down a key), and killing everything (repeat as necessary).

Graphically, the game more than holds its own — if a player is using a 3Dfx-based accelerator. With 3D enhancement, *Extreme Assault* offers a number of varied and interesting landscapes, including mountains, volcanoes, and rolling hills, along with highly detailed vehicles like helicopters and tanks. Unfortunately, for those who don't have access to any 3D accelerator or high-end system, even this level of eye candy enjoyment will be out of reach. The reality: playing in 320x200 with little detail.

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it's pretty, but *Extreme Assault* eventually wears thin with its repetitive gameplay

For the high-end user, *Extreme Assault* nicely handles an open game area, with detailed objects and a high frame rate. Unfortunately, things quickly wear thin, leaving the player with little idea of the point of the whole exercise, and less reason to care.

Rating: ★★

iF-22 Raptor

Publisher: Interactive Magic
Developer: iMAGIC Labs

For some six months earlier this year, Interactive Magic and NovaLogic were locked in a controversy over whether it was legally permissible for NovaLogic, or any company, to own the exclusive license to an item of military hardware. Fortunately for sim fans, military craft funded with public money were ruled public domain (except for classified material, of course), so Interactive Magic was free to release its own *iF-22 Raptor* title. Now that the hubbub has died down and will hopefully be forgotten, we can all get on with the job of being gamers.

The game thoughtfully includes options that allow it to nicely straddle the middle ground between being immediately enjoyable to the action addict while still maintaining its credibility as a sim. Players can choose from quickstart missions with full control over mission parameters, a full military campaign, and everything in between.



iF-22 Raptor is now legally available. No players will be embarrassed to have it on their shelf, but they could do better

As with many sims, learning the cockpit can be quite a challenge. Fortunately, there's very little involved in just jumping right in and flying. In fact, quickstart missions can even begin right in the air, weapons ready. Still, the manual is well-detailed and easy to follow, and the game includes a series of training missions designed to walk the player through each of the plane's systems.

All this having been said, however, *iF-22* isn't the greatest flight sim of all time. The engine is relatively fast, the graphics are relatively pretty, and the missions are relatively interesting.

Over the last few years, interactive Magic has built itself a strong reputation for quality military sims. While it's certain that *iF-22 Raptor* won't dent that rep, it's not exactly going to push it further along either. There's a lot here for the casual pilot, and something for the flight fan, but for the hard-core sim purist, it's just not anything to shout about.

Rating: ★★

Warlords III: Reign of Heroes

Publisher: Red Orb Entertainment
Developer: Strategic Studies Group

The *Warlords* series has always had its devotees, and with good reason — through two installments, it consistently offered some of the finest and most flexible turn-based strategy wargaming available. *Warlords II* continues that tradition, with the developers at SSG steadfastly ignoring the temptation to fall in with the *Warcraft* and *Command & Conquer* clones and switch to a realtime engine. Expanding on its predecessors, *Warlords III* offers the same turn-based strategy approach with improved AI, high-resolution graphics, improved multiplayer support, and new features.

Strategy revolves around conquering and controlling cities —



With some new advancements over *Warlords II*, *Warlords III* has high-res graphics, improved AI, and full multiplayer support

cities generate income and produce units, so the more cities captured, the more powerful the player becomes. *Warlords III* offers 64 different unit types, and while only sixteen can be used at a given time, that's still quite a lot of choice. A new feature is the addition of heroes — unique characters who can be assigned to a player at the outset, or bought or earned, and who can affect normal unit combat, use special items, and cast spells.

Strategy games aren't usually known for their complex graphics, and *Warlords III* is no exception, but there are distinct improvements over *Warlords II*. Gone are the square tile counters, replaced by more realistic-looking sprites, which are even animated, if only slightly. The high-resolution display looks good, however, and everything is clear and readable.

Warlords III takes many of the best aspects of tabletop wargaming and adapts them nicely to a PC environment, even offering an extended campaign mode for the first time in the series. The game also supports up to eight players over a LAN and four over the Internet (via the Red Orb Zone), and it even handles email moves. For those who prefer the mellow pace of a turn-based environment, it's just about as good as it gets.

Rating: ★★★★★

X-COM: Apocalypse

Publisher: Microprose
Developer: Mythos Games

The original *X-COM: UFO Defense* was an instant classic while its immediate sequel, *X-COM: Terror From the Deep* was a mild disappointment, using

exactly the same game engine and merely upping the difficulty level. *X-COM: Apocalypse* is fully updated and expanded, and thus the first true sequel. Expectations have been high, but the final product delivers — just.

As in the original, *X-COM: Apocalypse* is broken up into two distinct sections: tactical combat and resource management. Set in 2084, the game's milieu has been limited to the single city of Mega Primus, the last stronghold of humanity on a devastated Earth, now the site of a third alien invasion. It's obvious the developers wanted to increase the detail and tension levels, but one of the game's biggest failings is they just haven't given the city much personality. The graphics are crisp yet sterile — a *Sim City* with no sim. There are really no characters for players to empathize with, and thus little incentive for them to rescue the faceless inhabitants.

In city mode, the interface leaves much to be desired. While button bars make accessing vehicle and soldier information easy, commanding these things is a different matter. Manning vehicles is difficult, and god forbid players try to enter buildings after the original alert is over. Even experienced players will need to fiddle with this tab or that before rediscovering the correct submenu.

However, once tactical combat begins, the combat engine is not only intact, but better. Time tracking, plus the addition of running and crawling modes, adds interesting new aspects to firefighting. This is the kind of high-intensity, squad-level combat that made the original such a joy. On top of that, gameplay in *Apocalypse* is intact and every bit as good as it can be. As in previous games, the aliens begin with



The combat interface in *X-COM: Apocalypse* provides an incredible amount of data in a convenient manner

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rating

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cautious forays but quickly get plain nasty. The designers have added the option of playing in real time, but this feels like a gimmick and doesn't play out well within the X-COM structure — there's too much to keep track of, which means ignoring a lot and leaving soldiers to fend for themselves for stretches. This ignores the fact that it's precisely the high level of detail in control that makes the game so attractive in the first place.

In the end, *Apocalypse* is a step in the right direction for the series, but a step with a wobble. With better control over the cityscape, and more distinct atmosphere and character, it would have been a smash. As it is, it's enjoyable, and well-worth the investment in money and time, but not what it could have been.

Rating: ★★

XCar: Experimental Racing

Publisher: Bethesda

Softworks

Developer: Mediatech West

Delayed for a bit but finally available, Bethesda's *XCar: Experimental Racing* is one strange bird — not necessarily a

bad thing, just difficult to pin down. Based around a class of vehicles called the "sports prototypes," *XCar* attempts to pull the player into the world of cutting-edge, high-tech auto racing, offering sixteen of the most advanced cars in the world and ten tracks to race them on.

The tracks offer a lot of background variety: Most are bright, outdoorsy venues, from Mayan jungles to the American desert, which initially give *XCar* a decidedly arcade-like atmosphere — most players feel they can just jump right in and take off. However, while the game certainly features enough adjustments in difficulty and realism to make this possible, it misses the point: At its heart, *XCar* is a true racing sim.

Indeed, there is a daunting number of options for customizing cars, from different engines (there's even an engine editor, available as a patch, so players can create their own) to a paint shop and everything in between. There's even a fairly comprehensive telemetry display for testing and tweaking a car's performance.

Although the box lists the minimum system as a P60, to really appreciate the game's graphics and control requires a bit more



XCar offers players a chance to not only drive extremely fast cars, but design their own from the ground up

horsepower, at least a P120, preferably with a 3Dfx-based accelerator (one side note: the paint shop doesn't work under 3Dfx enhancement). For players who can afford it, the game is beautiful to look at, and the control is as smooth and responsive as one could ask for.

There are an awful lot of racing

titles out there, nearly all aimed at enthusiasts of one particular circuit or class of car. *XCar* has no license to speak of, throwing out any sort of endorsement in favor of raw performance and above all, speed. For players who just want to go fast, it delivers.

Rating: ★★

Macintosh

Achtung Spitfire

Publisher: Avalon Hill

Developer: Big Time Software

Achtung Spitfire is Avalon Hill and Big Time Software's latest strategic air combat game. Flight sim jockeys should beware, though, because *Achtung Spitfire* has more in common with *Panzer General* than it does with *Falcon*. The game is the latest in a long line of turn-based, tactical-board-game-style titles from the two companies. Players familiar with the classic *Flight Commander II* should feel immediately comfortable with *Achtung Spitfire*.

The player commands the Royal Air Force 11 Group, defending Britain against German attacks during World War II. *Achtung Spitfire* is based on the *Over the Reich* game engine, which Avalon Hill released late last year, but playing requires a completely different strategy. The game takes place during the Battle of Britain, so careful resource management of available pilots and aircraft, and strategic decisions about when to launch planes, as well as which planes to launch, have as much to do with



The Royal Air Force and Luftwaffe engage in a turn-based battle over England in Achtung Spitfire

winning the war as the actual combat.

There are more than thirty campaign combat situations, and players can choose to command either the British or German air force. New to the genre are naval attacks and a host of relatively unknown aircraft used over the skies of Britain. Period music, photographs, and artwork all lend verisimilitude to the game and enhance the experience. *Achtung Spitfire* isn't breaking new ground, but it is a solid and entertaining game, and a thoughtful diversion from the usually frenetic nature of computer games.

Rating: ★★

Gridz

Publisher: Green Dragon

Developer: Green Dragon

Gridz is the latest game from Green Dragon Creations, the company that ported *NetMech* and *Links LS* to Mac and developed *Xenophobe* for Bally. *Gridz* is a quirky combination of puzzle and action game that takes place in a Tron-like cyber environment in which the player generates automotons called Toolbots to expand the grid empire, hack away at enemy empires, or attack enemy Toolbots. Choosing the right Toolbots has a big impact on

how quickly you can eliminate your opponents' grid and expand your own. He who claims the most grids wins.

Gridz is a fun, simple game, but after the sixth or seventh level, it gets a bit redundant. What elevates this game above mediocrity is an unusual clarity of purpose in graphics, control, and design. *Gridz* is interesting to look at, and the Toolbot graphics and animations make you want to continue long enough to see more. Control is mouse-based and intuitive, which allows players to focus on strategy and winning rather than on which key to press. Control surfaces feel natural, and winning strategies develop easily and naturally out of gameplay.

Gridz doesn't fit neatly into a genre but resembles classic arcade games of the early '80s like *Q-Bert*. Most gamers will find it entertaining, especially playing over the Net, a feature that hasn't been implemented yet, but Green Dragon promises soon. Unfortunately, the game can't be found in stores. Like so many other commercially developed Macintosh games that can't find shelf space, *Gridz* is only for sale online.

Rating: ★★



Toolbots out for a hard day's work make up the gameplay of Gridz

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l e t t e r s

Letters of transit

I read with great interest the letter in your most recent issue about being carded at an arcade, and wanted to weigh in with an opinion on the other side of the issue.

In the past, video arcades have not generally been appealing to adults because they tend to become teenybopper hangouts, particularly in the evenings. My idea of a great evening out does not involve going to a place filled with hundreds of high school kids. It was fun when I was that age, but I don't fit in with that crowd anymore.

It may seem unfair to the younger crowd, but places like Gameworks and Speedzone have discovered there is a largely untapped market of adults who are willing to spend money in an arcade if the environment is right. Part of this environment involves the presence of a bar, but more importantly, the presence of other adults. If you've ever gone to a party where you didn't fit in and remember how you felt, you will understand why these arcades try to limit the crowd to adults in the

late evenings.

As for alienating "future consumers," I don't think these places need to worry. Locking out the younger generation certainly hasn't diminished the appeal of bars, nightclubs, casinos, and other such businesses. Generally, the age requirement heightens the desire for people to patronize the establishment once they are old enough to be allowed in.

Joel Lingenfelter
joel@fetful.org

Point made. Anyone else?

People tell me that there is a new PlayStation chip that could play Japanese games on American PlayStationS. Is that true? If it is, how much does it cost?

J.D. Roberts
jaydec23@juno.com

Actually, for \$750, Sony's black Yaroze hobbyist PlayStation development system can play Japanese titles just fine — it lets you code games too. Blue "testing stations" can play even unencrypted PlayStation discs,

although these are even more expensive and can't be bought unless you're a licensed developer.

The other option is to find a gray market vendor who can perform an operation known as "chipping" — replacing the regional lockout chip within the PlayStation for one that can play discs intended for markets outside the U.S. For various reasons, we can't recommend such a vendor, but look on the internet, since most such shops have web pages. Barring Net access, most places that provide the service tend to be smaller "Mom & Pop" operations and are not affiliated with any chain, so check merchants and video stores who do PlayStation repairs and don't deal directly with Sony (who really, really, really frowns on this, by the way).

Needless to say, if you do chip your PlayStation, you'll void your warranty, and you could open yourself up to some serious legal trouble if you use the chipped PlayStation to play pirated games — including violation of copyright laws, which can result in severe civil and criminal penalties.

Caveat emptor.

I've been reading your magazine for a long time. I like it well enough, but there's one thing that just gets me every time I pick it up. The rating system sucks. You rated some of my favorite games three stars or less! Get with it, people — start being objective. It's like you just looked at screenshots and decided you didn't like them.

First of all, *X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter* is a GREAT game, and you guys dogged on it the whole time. Sure, it may not be a technological breakthrough, but it's got better graphics and I think better gameplay than the first two

games combined.

You rated *Soul Blade* as a four star when it obviously deserves five stars. After playing *Soul Blade*, I put down *Tekken 2* and I haven't played it since, and it got five stars.

And that's not the end of it. Other games like *Broken Helix*, *Discworld*, *Hi Octane*, *Jet Moto*, *Carnage Heart*, and especially *Horned Owl*, all underrated.

Just get with it.

William Smith
Jerry233@juno.com

Um, to begin with, using your own opinions about games as the defining yardstick for our "objectivity," stating the case prima facie with little further evidence, has an obvious logical and semantic flaw.

However, rest assured, **Next Generation's** reviewers do spend an inordinate amount of time with each title — just ask our worrisome managing editor — and the reasoning behind every score is made clear in the body of the review (usually — we admit not always, but this is the ideal we aspire to). Whether what was important to us is important to you is then for you to decide, and you can form your own opinions accordingly.

Besides which, every one of the games you mentioned got very positive scores — for the umpteenth time, three stars means a good game. And most of the games you mention, including *Jet Moto* and *Carnage Heart*, got an excellent rating of four stars. Chill.

I have a few points to make regarding the intro in **NG 33**. First, why does a question like that ("Is technology finished?") even come up? It is either arrogant or ignorant to think that the current technology you have is utterly



Are upscale, adult-oriented arcades like Gameworks a benefit to mature gamers, or are they shutting out their core audience?

corresponding

unimprovable. John Romero (and others like him) fail to see the limits of their own technology. I have a list of complaints from me and others like me about the lack of realism from the *Quake* engine (and from any engine, at that), which can only be remedied by the construction of a new game engine. For the sake of space I have decided not to present the list, but let me just say that anyone who thinks that technology is finished should be planning for retirement because if they don't advance the technology, then someone else will and they will be left behind.

Second, I would like to compliment whoever thought of the analogy in the third paragraph comparing the end of the road for technology to the patent official. As far as I can see, John Romero thinks that everything that can be invented, has been.

Elling Eidbo
Paintboy@ix.netcom.com

The point that Romero (and the many) others who share his view are trying to make is that videogame technology has reached the "movie camera" stage. While there has been innovation in cameras, the cameras used to make *Birth of a Nation* (the first feature film) aren't that different from the ones used to make *Anaconda*. Yet the creativity of moviemakers and the quality of movies have continued to ... well, maybe *Anaconda* was the best example, but you get their point. Are Romero and company right? The first indication will surely be *Daikatana* — if it manages to be the "next big thing" while still using "the last big thing's" engine, Romero's arguments will carry much more weight. Time will tell.

I enjoyed NG 33, especially the how to sell your game idea article, since for a year I have been documenting a game floating around in my head. I think it's great that a magazine has shown the behind-the-scenes of what it takes to get noticed, even with the fact that most companies have policies

of not even opening unsolicited game ideas, let alone reading them. I have found this to be the hard truth on my own.

I'm far from the authority on selling game ideas, but I think readers should also know there are other ways to get game ideas noticed. Contests are an example. Nintendo recently held an idea contest for kids, and I've also been told that sometimes there are contests amateurs can enter for cash prizes. Some readers might say, "Yeah right," but I would think the odds of winning and the odds of actually getting an idea read by a game company are about the same. At least you would have a chance, and most companies that I've sent ideas to won't even give you that.

Jason Martin
o0nzerozero00o@hotmail.com

Certainly an idea. Basically, anything you can do to get your ideas noticed — short of breaking the law, of course — is worth trying. The amateur contest you're referring to is sponsored by Enix. This year, the Japanese company is giving away a top prize of \$200,000 to the best project submitted by December 20, 1997, with a total of \$400,000 to be awarded. The catch, for budding designers anyway, is that you must submit a finished game, not just an idea. And yes, people really do win (the winner of the 1996 contest was a puzzle game designed by two friends in Chile). For more info, check out the company's contest page at http://www2.marinet.or.jp/~enix/contest_j/index_n.html.

Several months ago you guys did a huge article on Net Yaroze, Sony's PlayStation home development kit. You (along with others in the industry) talked about how great this would be, how it would allow anyone who could program in C to write games like people did in the old days of the Apple II and the Commodore 64, how it would bring fresh, new ideas to the industry. Being a novice programmer myself, I was extremely interested in its



Actually, we think the sad truth is that in order to get their wings, cherubs have to trade in their belly buttons. It's a quid pro quo thing

prospects.

Well, it's been quite some time since that article, and I haven't seen shit about it in your magazine since. Was it released? How many units were sold? Did it sell more or less than Sony's expectations? Are there any promising results yet? What's the feedback from people who have purchased it? Have you guys played anything that's been created by it? What's the deal?

Michael Rubin
mikerubin1@aol.com

Sony's Net Yaroze was in fact released earlier this year, amid much apparent public interest but little official fanfare from Sony. Since then Sony has kept almost completely silent on the subject, which would lead us to believe the system hasn't sold even as well as the already modest expectations the company had for it in the U.S.

However, that having been said, the developers-only area at the Net Yaroze U.S. site (<http://www.scea.sony.com/net/> — where you can also purchase the system, FYI) continues to hum along. When you consider that Yaroze titles currently in the works are the labor of one person (or perhaps a very small group), probably coded and designed during spare hours, it may in fact be a while yet before anything resembling an actual game becomes available for perusal — it also doesn't help that you have to

own a Yaroze to play a Yaroze-designed game.

We continue to follow the story though. We've had a Yaroze follow-up and how to on the back burner for a while. Look for it in the first half of 1998. In the meantime, check out the official Net Yaroze site at http://www.playstation.com/netyaroze/index_lo.html.

In issue 33, why doesn't the cherub on the cover have a belly button? Also, in issue 33, on page 146, the review of *Super GT* is in the arcade category but has the PC title bar above it. Was that a joke? And finally I'm wondering if anyone can tell me where I can find more information on the programs written about in the Toolbox section of issue 33 on page 22.

Stan
stanman@usaor.net

The cherub is an angel. Angels are made, not born, so they don't have belly buttons. The PC header over *Super GT* was, well, a mistake. It should have said Arcade. As for the developer kits covered on page 22, that wasn't actually a Toolbox column, but rather a news story on software that will soon be available but isn't ready yet. Rest assured, as soon as the software is ready for review, you'll get the full story in future editions of Toolbox (which makes its long-overdue return in this issue, by the way).

ng

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1. How much time did you spend reading or looking at the November 1997 issue of **Next Generation** magazine?
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3. Please check how thoroughly you read each of the following articles/departments that appeared in this issue and how you rate each article you read.

Section/article	Didn't read	Read half	Read entirely	Your rating			
				Excellent	Good	Average	Poor
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breaking/Sega's new console	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
breaking/Toolbox	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
breaking/Ioyriding	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
breaking/Arcadia	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
breaking/Movers and Shakers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
ng special/25 breakthrough games	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
ng software/Alphas	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
ng special/The way games ought to be	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
rating/Finals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
now hiring	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
corresponding/Letters	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Haven't seen disc							
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